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The Black Cat

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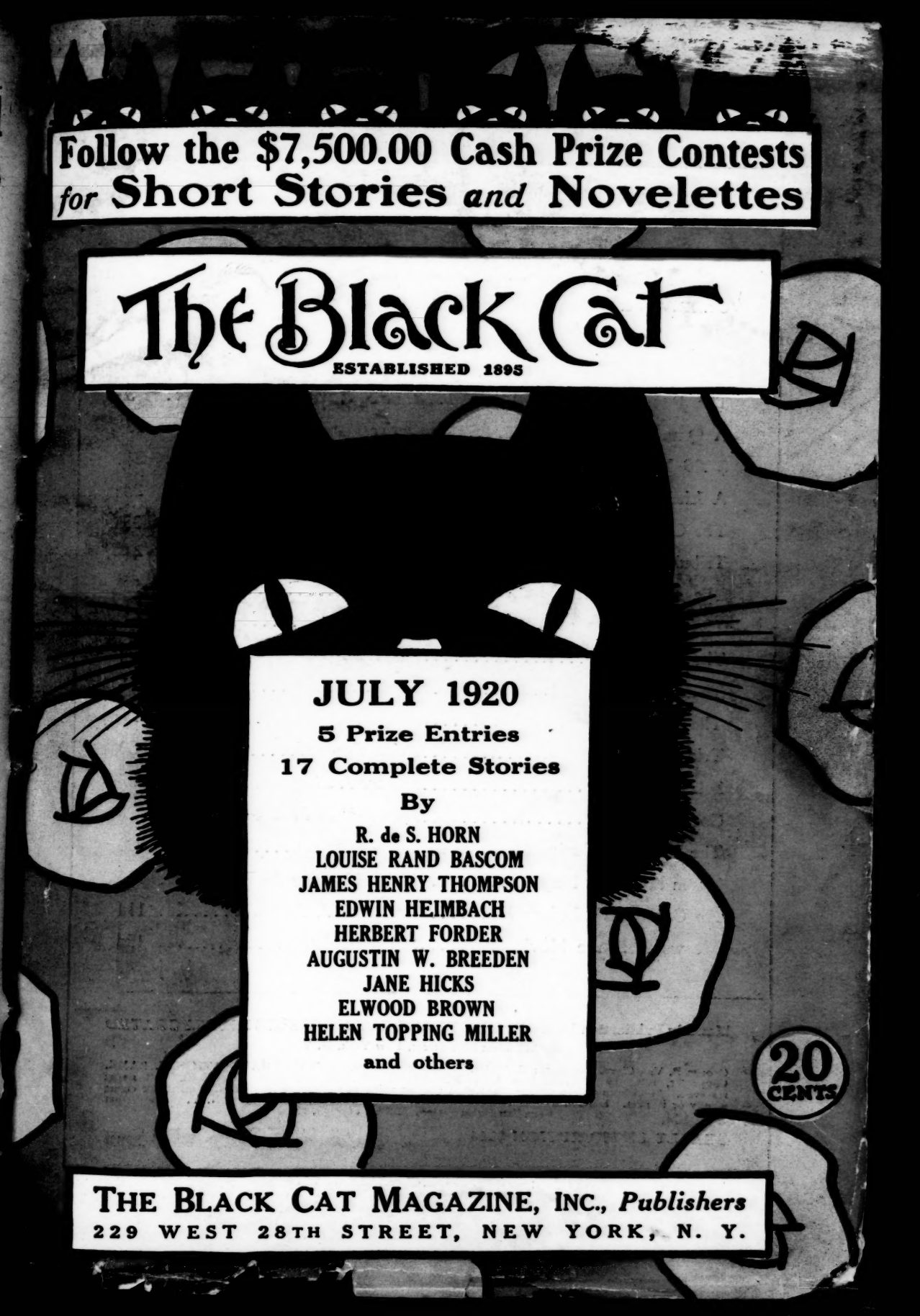

JULY 1920

5 Prize Entries

17 Complete Stories

By

R. de S. HORN
LOUISE RAND BASCOM
JAMES HENRY THOMPSON
EDWIN HEIMBACH
HERBERT FORDER
AUGUSTIN W. BREEDEN
JANE HICKS
ELWOOD BROWN
HELEN TOPPING MILLER
and others

20 CENTS

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The Black Cat

Established 1895

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WHEN this number reaches our readers, though it is dated July, there will yet remain fifteen days before the closing date of the short-story contest—June 30. We are therefore printing once more the conditions of the contest for the benefit of the many writers who will not get their stories into the mails until the last day.

Much can be done in fifteen days. Many successful writers produce a story a week. Henry Leverage, whose novel *The Cup of Gold* will begin in the August issue, wrote *Whispering Wires*, his best-selling novel, in a month. You still have time to write your story, or, if you have written it, to rewrite and give the manuscript the final polish.

This is the last call. If you do not want to be left at the post, get your manuscript into the mail on or before June 30. No manuscript postmarked later than that date will be considered for the contest.

$2,500.00

IN CASH PRIZES

for the Best Plot-and-Action NOVELETTES

THE PRIZES ARE:

1st Prize	**$1000**	**3rd Prize**	**$500**
2nd "	**750**	**4th "**	**250**

CONDITIONS:

The conditions of this contest are the same as those governing the short-story contest (see pages 125-128) with two exceptions: (1) novelettes may range in length from 10,000 to 25,000 words; (2) the competition will close August 31st, 1920.

Manuscripts should be addressed "The Black Cat Magazine, Inc., 229 West 28th Street, New York, N. Y.," and envelopes or wrappers should be plainly marked "Prize Contest." Stories fulfilling the conditions of the contest and found to be acceptable for publication in the BLACK CAT will be paid for at regular rates on acceptance. Publication of these stories will begin as soon as possible, and within sixty days of the closing date of the contest awards will be announced in the BLACK CAT and paid in cash.

The publishers cannot emphasize too strongly the necessity for stories of plot and action. The prize winners will be the plot builders; they will be the writers who succeed in packing into 25,000 words or less dramatic and conflicting incidents and actions occurring in the shortest possible time in the lives of the fewest possible characters—the whole developed to a powerful climax and a reasonable and satisfying conclusion.

Write of present-day life, and avoid the morbid, gruesome, supernatural and unpleasantly tragic.

THE JOSS OF THE GOLDEN WHEEL

By R. de S. HORN

Entered in the BLACK CAT *Short Story Contest*

IT was an ancient twisting street, so narrow that two 'rickshaws could scarcely pass; not at all the sort of street that white men usually chose. Yet the tall, well-built man who came that way, now stepping briskly, now loitering along, was undoubtedly white, though the tan of sunburn lay heavy on his skin. The set of his shoulders, the swing of his stride, the alertness of his manner, would have marked him for a foreigner anywhere in Shanghai.

Suddenly the tall man halted. Some fifty feet ahead of him in the crooked alley the two Chinese boys with their bulky mat-covered bundle had stopped outside a dwelling; they were evidently conversing with someone inside. Then they, with their burden, disappeared within the building. In a few seconds they would be out again. Without a moment's hesitation the foreigner stepped inside the nearest doorway.

As he did so he became immediately conscious that he had run into someone coming out. There was a faint exclamation, suddenly silenced as his left arm went over the stranger's mouth; at the same time his right arm went around and back and his whole weight pinned the stranger against the wall.

Three, four, five seconds passed. He could hear the voices of the Chinese boys as they approached, came opposite the door, and passed beyond. Five seconds more, and he swung his captive into the light from the open door. And then he dropped both hands and stepped back in surprise. The stranger he had treated so unceremoniously was a woman—a white woman!

For a second he stared; then his eyes narrowed.

"You—" he demanded harshly, "who are you?"

The white girl—for she was not more than twenty—rubbed her lips where his hand had pressed.

"Mary Anderson," she answered calmly. "From the American Mission School."

"What are you doing here, in the Forbidden District? Don't you know it is dangerous for a white woman to come here alone?"

"I know." She spoke very quietly. "I do not often come by myself. But to-day there was no one to come. And the mother of Huen Chen was very sick."

Then for the first time the man noticed that in the far corner there was a mat, and someone stretched upon it. After a single glance he turned to the girl again.

"If you are leaving now," he said gruffly, "I'll go along with you. No place, here, for you to be alone."

"I'm not afraid," replied the girl. "But if you insist, you may. Whom may I thank for the kindness, please?"

The man hesitated momentarily, and flushed. "My name is Crosby—Jack Crosby," he replied. At the same time his keen gaze searched her countenance closely.

But there was no change in her expression, as she passed through the doorway, to indicate that she had ever before heard that name, a name known from Vladivostock to Port Said.

After that they met often. For the mother of Huen Chen was very sick indeed. And every day the white man, Crosby, dropped over from his business to talk with the girl. He did not tell her that he was there because in the little shop down the street, Pei Ling—who was a goldsmith, and whose father and father's father before him had been goldsmiths—was busy at a great wheel, pounding here and twisting there, covering it over with the shining yellow metal. He did not tell her that his "business" there was to stand and watch which one of Chang Fu's servants came oftenest, to sit cross-legged and watch the pounding hammer of Pei Ling. What should women know of such matters?

So what they talked of was life in the sweltering East, and of the new Governor who was soon to arrive; of the King's birthday, and of the Mission; and of Mary Anderson. Thus he learned of the four years she had spent there, and how her father had died, and how her "folks" in America had written for her to return. But she could not go yet, for many reasons, reasons like the mother of Huen Chen, for instance.

And as the white man sat and listened he became aware of many things: the way the sunlight fell on Mary Anderson's hair, and changed the brown to gold; the way her eyes smiled when she laughed, and grew soft when she spoke of sad things; the whiteness of her teeth, and the way she smiled, and all the countless things that go to distinguish one woman from another. Occasionally he talked, fluently and interestingly, of the Isthmus and the Straits Settlements, of Mandalay and Tonquin, of Indian bazaars and Chinese feasts. But never did he talk of himself.

And on her mat in the corner the Chinese woman lay, and watched them curiously, these two foreign devils that met each day in her house: she with her rice and sweets from the Mission, he with his hands empty, save for a little stick. The rice was good; but this Christ of whom they spoke—perhaps that might be the foreign devils' name for Confucius, or even the Golden Buddha himself.

So thus it went, even after the white man had finished his "business" and knew without doubt that it was the big broken-nosed servant of Chang Fu—the one at the first table, as you enter—who came each day to Pei Ling's shop in the narrow street. And then one day the white man caught himself thinking of Mary Anderson, and comparing her with all those other women he had known throughout the Mystic East: Port Said to Allabad; Hong-Kong to Singapore. And all these others suffered much discredit in the comparison.

"Fool!" he told himself. "Fool! What have you to do with women? Stick to your business! God! Think how they'd laugh in Singapore!"

He was a fool, and he knew it. And because he knew it he went that same afternoon to the house in the winding street. Mary Anderson was already there. Her very tranquility, as she leaned over Huen Chen's mother, somehow disturbed him.

"Miss Anderson," he began abruptly, "are you still coming down here alone?"

The girl looked up in surprise.

"Well, yes, in a way," she answered. "That is, no one comes with me. But I believe one of the Mission boys follows me. It's a funny thing, but I believe he follows me everywhere."

"What? Somebody following you?"

She laughed at the ill-humor in his voice. "Oh, it's nothing to worry about. I believe he thinks he is taking care of me. It's a boy that fell in the fire when he was little, and father saved him from burning to death. He adopted father, and now it seems he's adopted me!"

She finished her explanation, but the white man made no comment. He had just noticed, very suddenly, that the corners of Mary Anderson's mouth were drooping slightly, and that there were

dark circles under her eyes and tired little lines out near the corners.

"Look here," he said, almost roughly, "you're working too hard! There are things about your face and eyes that oughtn't to be there. You stay out of this hole for awhile, and get plenty of rest and sunshine for a change."

"No, it isn't that," she answered, and for the first time he missed the little note of cheerfulness in her voice. "It's just the—the East getting on my nerves a little, I guess. It's the silence, the mystery; the never hearing people's footsteps when they walk. Nothing but mats! You don't know what I'd give to hear a squeaky shoe again, on a wooden floor!" She gave a laugh that sounded a little queer and unnatural.

"You poor kid! You're homesick; that's what's the matter with you." As he said it, Crosby reached over and gave her hand a cheerful little pat. He, too, knew that dismal sensation of sheer lonesomeness that comes over you when you first begin to realize the awful infinity and hoariness that is the East.

"Yes, I reckon it is," she answered slowly. "Ever since father died it's been coming over me. If I could just be home for a month or two!"

"Go on," encouraged Crosby. "Tell me about it."

"Oh, it wouldn't interest you. It's just one of those ordinary little Southern towns, with a schoolhouse and three churches, and a little old depot, and five trains a day. Why, they still have wooden hitching posts in front of all the houses!"

She stopped for a moment, and Crosby saw that the color was coming back to her cheeks again.

"And there are oak trees all down the streets—great big oaks with acorns as big as your thumb—and the boys have acorn fights coming home from school. And there's a post-office, where the population congregates at mail time. Nobody has any money, and nobody wants any."

"Nobody wants to have money?" repeated the white man.

"No. They just live, and are happy. For ten thousand dollars you can buy a farm close to town, with a house on it. For twenty thousand you could buy the best store in the place. And with thirty thousand; why, you'd be the richest man in the county, I expect!"

She laughed again, but the man thought he saw a suspicious glint near the corner of her eye.

"Listen, Mary," he said gently—it was the first time he had ever called her that, though neither noticed it—"out here is no place for you! You weren't intended for this sort of thing. You just pack up and catch that next boat back to 'Frisco—there's one leaving day after to-morrow—and then take the first train back to that town with the oak trees. You haven't said anything about the fellow, but I bet you'll find him still waiting, if he has any sense at all!"

The girl drew herself up. "There isn't any fellow waiting," she said sharply. "And I've got to go now. It's getting late." There was very little further conversation between them, even to the Mission gate, which was as far as he had ever gone.

All the way home that night the white man was very thoughtful. "Ten thousand dollars!" It kept running through his head. "What the devil am I thinking of ten thousand for?" he asked himself. "Why not fifty thousand? A hundred thousand?" He had always thought in such sums before; he had owned such sums, in fact. But now a mere ten thousand! He laughed at himself; but eventually he stopped in a corner, drew out his billfold and counted the contents over in his hand. "One hundred and forty-four pounds. And a few odd shillings." He laughed again, derisively. Only seven hundred dollars! And he needed all that in his "business"; five hundred for one thing, two hundred for the other.

He returned the billfold to his pocket

and went on up to the Dragon Gate whereby one enters the Temple of Sin that Chang Fu runs, just outside the Foreign Club. As he turned to enter he was hailed by someone coming from the club:

"I say, Crosby. How are you, old chap?"

"Oh, so-so," returned Crosby, without stopping.

But the English officer in undress uniform stopped and lighted a cigarette, apparently purposing a few minutes conversation. "The new Governor came yesterday morning. Rum old chap, the new Governor; great stickler for morals and all that, you know."

"So?" returned Crosby, with mild interest. "Where's the old boy from, last?"

"Singapore." The Englishman shifted his weight uneasily and gazed carefully away at a distant pagoda. "The old duffer saw you this morning, coming out of the club; asked who you were and said something about knowing you in the Straits Settlements. And he said to tell you there'd be two boats leaving within the week; and he didn't think you ought to miss them both." The officer's face was looking redder and more uncomfortable with each word. He said there was no hurry, or rush, or anything like that, but— Hang it, Crosby!" he broke off, "it's deuced unpleasant for me to have to tell you this, don't you know, but—"

"Oh, never mind, Craigen," interrupted Crosby. "I know. Just carrying out orders, and all that thing. I'm much obliged to you, Craigen." He strode away through the gate, leaving a most uncomfortable-looking Englishman outside.

The business which the American had inside Chang Fu's place was apparently no business at all. There were a few white men scattered around the drowsy rooms: mostly English officers off duty, one or two Americans, and a few tourists. With none of these Crosby interested himself, other than a mere salutation. He wandered idly around, fingering the wheels and even stopping to gaze curiously at the heavy drapery that mysteriously covered one side of the wall.

Just at this moment, the curtain parted and from behind it came two persons: one a native boy in white, with a broad nose and a limp; the other a dignified old Chinaman of fifty or so. After a second the broad-nosed one bowed obsequiously and returned to the reaches behind the hanging, while the other came forward with elaborate Oriental dignity. For this was Chang Fu himself, the Lord of the Temple of Clinking Sin. As one who greets an honored guest, he bowed to Crosby.

"Would the Foreign Lord honor the house of Chang Fu by playing a little? The fan-tan? The roulette?"

"Oh, no; nothing in that line to-day," laughed Crosby. "To-morrow, perhaps."

To-morrow night, then, the Foreign Lord would confer his honorable presence upon his servant's humble house? It was but a poor place: but he—Chang Fu—would do his best to make pleasure for the honorable guests. Many others of the Foreign Lords were coming.

"Perhaps."

Crosby wandered casually away. But once outside the Dragon Entrance he hurried around to a side gate in the wall, and there he waited, in the shadow of a mulberry tree.

Through the gate men passed and repassed, but still the white man waited. Finally came the one he sought, and with him the white man silently trailed, down two streets and into an alley. There he overtook him and tapped him on the arm. The native turned. He had a broad nose that might once have been broken, and one knee was twisted to a queer angle.

The conversation, begun with the passing of a coin which the native accepted impassively, proceeded in the strictly impersonal manner of the white man dealing with his inferiors.

The boy from Chang Fu's—he was go-

ing to run, in the new room, the wheel that was being prepared at Pei Ling's?

Tao Tsung was but Chang Fu's servant; who was he, that he should deny the Foreign Lord?

Tao Tsung knew the wheels of Chang Fu were crooked? That they could be made to stop as the Gods desired; and by means of little wires and things?

The Moon and the Stars must be the White Man's ancestors, since nothing was unknown to him.

A-ah; how many *taels* did Chang Fu pay the Chinese boy each week?

Only two *taels* each week—and rice.

How, then, would the Chinese boy like to make as much in one night as Chang Fu would pay him in a lifetime?

To this the answer was a shrug of the shoulders. Buddha alone possessed such wealth.

But still the white man persisted. If Tao Tsung, the next night, would make the wheel stop on the White Man's stake it might be that he would receive a hundred pounds—nay, a hundred and twenty pounds — of the Englishmen's money; more than one could carry in a double 'rickshaw.

The White Man might be the Golden Gautama himself, in wealth. But Chang Fu's servant knew not which numbers the wheel could be made to stop on. Chang Fu himself changed them each day, and only told his servants in the evening, just before the play began.

Then if the White Man found out which number the wheel would stop on, would Chang Fu's servant stop it on the White Man's stake?

If the White Man gave Tao Tsung the English money he had spoken of, then he, Tao Tsung, was no longer Chang Fu's servant; he was the White Man's servant.

So it was settled. A hundred and twenty pounds of the Englishmen's money passed into Tao Tsung's hands.

For the last time, the white man went down the little crooked street to the house of Huen Chen's mother; for the last time, he told himself. He had already made up his mind to be very polite and distant. And as Mary Anderson's attention was largely given to Huen Chen's mother there was very little said during the whole hour, up to the time they came to leave. Courteously he stood aside that she might pass first through the door.

And then suddenly, roughly, his arm went around her and he drew her back against him.

From down the street came an uproar, a hubbub of shouts and cries, the rattle and thud of blows. It sounded nearer and nearer.

"Keep quiet! Not a sound!" whispered the white man fiercely. "It's a riot, a street fight!"

Shivering she obeyed, while the narrow alley outside filled with the clamor and din of the mob. Then it swept by, a tangled mass of hammering, hacking, stabbing humanity, with a swish of sticks and the occasional glint of steel. For a moment it was at the door; then it swept past and on, leaving its bright red trails on the dirty stones.

"'Rickshaw men and sailors; all drunk!" said the white man coolly. "That's what I meant when I said you oughtn't to come here alone. What if you'd been out here alone and run into that?"

He felt her tremble against him; his arm still held her close. Then she turned her face up toward his. "Don't, don't scold me," she whispered, half-wistfully.

Her face was close to his; he could even see the golden flecks in the darker brown of her eyes. Without permission or apology he bent downward and kissed her upturned lips. She did not resist, but when he raised his head she stood there, regarding him with open, curious eyes.

"I didn't know you cared like that," she said gravely.

"Cared?" He repeated the words wonderingly. Then his face took on a hard bitter cast as he half turned from her. "Cared? God! What right have I to—?"

"S-s-sh," she interrupted, placing a forbidding finger over his lips. "Don't talk like that! What's the matter? What's troubling you, Boy?"

He shook his head silently, with closed eyes.

"Listen, Boy," she said quietly, laying one hand on his shoulder, "I know there are people, men, out here, who stay because they must; because they can't go home. Is that it? Is there any reason why you can't go back?"

He was silent for a moment before he answered her. Then, "No; there is no reason."

"Then what's the trouble? Is it that you don't care?"

"No, no! It isn't that! You know that I do!" he exclaimed fiercely. "But what right have I to care for you? For anyone?"

She looked up, uncomprehending. With his eyes fixed stonily ahead the white man continued:

"Suppose that a friend, a man you knew, had thrown himself away; had wasted and squandered, foolishly and recklessly, all his life. After you thought that, after you had found it out, would you still care for him?"

The girl's eyes, as he turned to her, met his steadily. "I would never ask him," she said. "It would not matter—afterward."

Still he was unconvinced. "But afterward," he persisted, "if, by chance—"

"Chance?' She almost smiled. "There isn't any such thing as 'Chance.' Everything in the world is just as certain as you want it to be!"

With the words her hand slipped along his sleeve, to his shoulder, and up, over his shoulder. From her mat in the corner the Chinese woman stared at them amiably, with the frank curiosity of her race.

CHANG FU'S gilded pagoda was crowded that night. For one thing, it was a Feast Day, the Feast of the Dwarf Yellow Plums. And for another, there had been rumors of surprises, of strange entertainment, prepared for the guests in the Temple of Sin. It was even whispered that the new Governor would drop in—in mufti, of course—to see for himself what it was like.

So the rooms and balconies were alive early, with more coming, as the different groups finished dinner; everyone jocular and frivolous, with a laughing air of expectancy.

And then, precisely at nine, just as a very stiff military-looking man with an iron-gray moustache had come quietly in, with several companions, a little bell tinkled somewhere. The mysterious curtain at the side parted and swung slowly back. And beyond appeared a marvellous compartment, all pictures and silk and glitter of gold and silver. In the center stood Chang Fu, silked and sandaled like a mandarin; and beside him was a table, a huge table, a marvellous table, of darkly-glowing wood, upborne on a carved pedestal sufficient in magnificence to have supported the tomb of the Son of Heaven himself.

But on the table was the eighth wonder: a wheel, a great glittering wheel, whose rim and axis and radial spokes gave off the dull glint of purest beaten gold. And behind the wonder, in the colorless white of contrast, stood a yellow statue, calm and immobile, living only in the two eyes that glittered on either side of the broad distorted nose. Tao Tsung was at his post.

It was toward this wonderful wheel that Chang Fu invited his guests, with many and ceremonious bows.

"Rum old beggar," commented the man with the iron-gray moustache. "Looks like Royalty, doesn't he? He's crooked though, I'll wager."

"Undoubtedly," agreed his companion. "Most of these places are."

"Pity the concession won't let us run these fellows out like we can the foreigners," growled the iron-moustached man, "like we did in the Straits, for instance."

"They tell me you cleaned out Singapore pretty thoroughly," suggested the other man curiously.

"Clean as a whistle; that's one satisfaction, anyway!" The jaws that went with the iron-gray moustache came together firmly. "Care to go inside? There's a chap just gone in there I've seen before, and I'd like to watch. Better come; may be interesting."

Inside they found a crowd already surrounding the table, mostly inspecting the wheel curiously. There was some slight play, some few coins staked by beginners, but the real players had not yet begun.

"Ah, Crosby—going to try your luck to-night, I see," called a voice near the table; and the American turned, to find his officer friend of the day before beside him.

"Oh, I don't know; directly, maybe," he made casual answer. "Nothing heavy to-night, though." For a time he stood aside and watched, as the stake coins dropped on the checkered squares, to multiply, or disappear with the spinning of the wheel. By and by he stepped forward and placed a gold sovereign on the sixth square.

"To the God of Chance!" he said, clearly and distinctly, gazing squarely across the wheel into the face of Tao Tsung. Unblinkingly the almond eyes met his. The golden wheel spun; the flying ball slowed, and dropped into number "32."

"Your God of Chance has deserted you to-night, Crosby," laughed the Englishman at his shoulder.

"Maybe," replied Crosby, without turning, "and maybe there isn't any such thing as 'Chance.' We'll have to try again and see."

After that he played curiously, dropping a coin here and a coin there; never more than one at a time. Sometimes he won. More frequently he lost. The store of gold coins for which he had that day exchanged his paper currency was rapidly dwindling.

"Jolly queer playing, I say," remarked the Englishman again. "Never saw you play such small sums, nor scatter them so, before."

"System," replied the American. "Just working out a system before I really start playing."

"Then I'll not play along with you to-night, old chappie! When a beggar like you, that's been playing for years, starts talking systems, it's time for a blighter like me to quit!"

"Your privilege, Major. Suit yourself. Hi there, Old God of Chance!" And again the American played a sovereign, this time on the "first dozen." And lost. He tried again with the "second dozen." And when the ball had clicked down into the bottom of the wheel he received his coin back and two others with it. After that he tried "cornering," or dividing his stake between four squares. He even played the humble "odd and even." He was winning now, more than he was losing. A straight bet on number "27" brought him thirty-five pounds back. He placed a bet on a "corner" of four numbers, one of which was "27," and was rewarded with nine times his stake.

By now his steady play and increasing luck had attracted the attention of others, and quite a small crowd had gathered around the table. Suddenly he leaned forward and placed a stack of twenty coins—one hundred dollars—on the number "27."

As he drew back from the table his left elbow struck someone. He turned. Chang Fu, the Lord of the Temple of Sin, stood beside him, watching the play. At the same time the wheel spun, slowed; and the ball dropped.

"Number '32'!"

The face of the broad-nosed Chinaman behind the wheel was inscrutable.

Crosby shrugged his shoulders, but he could not deny to himself that he was nervous. He had less than six pounds left. He began to play carefully, almost niggardly. With his cautious play public interest immediately deserted him.

Slowly, very slowly, he began to build up his fortunes again, betting one coin with each spin of the wheel. Only a few spectators were watching him now, but one of these was a man with an iron-gray moustache.

"Do you see this chap playing here?" the latter asked his companion. "The one that just won on the 'dozens'?"

"Yes," replied the other, "I've seen him before. Name's Crosby, I believe. He plays often. Just a small player, though; never very high."

"Well," remarked the moustached man dryly, "I've seen that 'small player' of yours win a hundred thousand in a single evening. And lose as much, too."

"What? A hundred thousand dollars?"

"No. Pounds."

"Jove!" exclaimed the other. "Who would have imagined it! Not me—with his hands shaking over a five pound bet!"

"I hadn't noticed that. Too much drink lately, I imagine. Those fellows must get nervous, sometimes." The Governor's voice was almost pitying.

It was at this moment that the American decided to make the plunge. Taking his entire capital from his pocket he suddenly heaped it all on one square: two hundred pounds—almost a thousand dollars—on number "27."

"For the last time, the God of Chance!" he invoked, and felt that his voice was trembling.

At the size of the stake there were low exclamations from those nearest. Swift whispers ran through the rooms and men hurried to witness the play. Many of these, from idle curiosity or queer predilections as to luck, clustered around to make their bets, until the numbered squares were covered with their coins. Behind the table, as expressionless as the Sphinx, stood Tao Tsung, the Slave of the Wheel, waiting for the last stake to be placed.

Suddenly Chang Fu stood beside him.

"Wait!" The voice was gentle and bland. "Tao Tsung, may-be-so, is tired." Chang Fu turned to his personal attendant. "Bring Chong Lee."

The American felt that his veins had gone suddenly dry. His hands clinched until the nails bit into the flesh. His lips burned; his whole body felt distant and queer. On that numbered square rested his entire possessions, his fortune, his future; all chance on the single spin of a wheel, a wheel ruled over by the God of Chance. Only in Chang Fu's house there was no God of Chance; nothing but a God of Certainty! And Chang Fu's God of Certainty, in the person of Chong Lee, was now before him.

Mechanically the white man gazed at Chong Lee, but his dazed brain acknowledged only a vague impression, a misty vision of an Oriental face, with two dark eyes that stared, and a scar—a huge, livid, puckering scar. Behind, floating over Chong Lee's shoulder, he could just see the oily yellowness of Chang Fu's face.

Crosby straightened. "To the God of—" he began; and got no further.

Noiselessly, hypnotically, the wheel began to spin. It's golden glitter dazzled his eyes, tired his brain. It was growing larger—larger—

Suddenly from somewhere went up a distant shout. "He's won! By Jove, he's won! Six thousand pounds!" Then he became aware of men laughing, cheering, pounding him on the back, while he himself stared insanely down at a little ball that nestled at the bottom of the pocket marked "27." Chang Fu was extending toward him a loose sheaf of colored paper slips.

"Will the Honorable Lord play again?" asked Chang Fu of the bland Oriental face.

Crosby stood unsteadily on his feet.

His hands were still clinched, his breath was coming fast, and his heart was thumping like a drum. The perspiration stood in beads on his forehead. With unsteady hands he took the bills and thrust them, uncounted, into his pocket. Wordless, he made his way out into the main compartment, across it to the entrance, and on, hatless, into the night.

"By Jove! But that *is* queer!" exclaimed the iron-moustached man to his companion of the evening. "First time I ever saw one those beggars quit just after a big win!"

THERE was all the usual hub-bub and bustle down at the Oriental-Pacific docks where the Star of the West was just getting under-way. The last noisy good-byes had been said, the gang planks had been dragged ashore, and now the passengers were lining the rails, shouting farewell messages to their friends and acquaintances on the wharf below. These passengers were of all sorts and races: broad-shouldered, ruddy Britishers; restless business men, mostly of the oil companies; stiffly-erect army officers on their way home from the Philippines; wide-eyed tourists; and here and there an occasional dignified Chinaman.

In steamer chairs close to the rail, but apart from all the rest, sat a quiet couple. Their clothes were of the most unassuming sort: her's a plain tailored serge, his a quiet business suit. The girl had her hand on the arm of her companion's chair and was talking pleasantly to him.

"Jack!" she exclaimed gleefully. "Going home! After four years! Wasn't it lucky you sold out your business so we could catch this first boat, instead of having to wait a month or so?"

"Very lucky!" assented her companion, with a rather peculiar smile. "I had the whole thing arranged in advance, I thought, and just at the last minute something went wrong; and then it was only pure luck that pulled me through."

"Luck!" she scoffed. "Didn't I tell you the other day there wasn't any such thing as luck? You're as bad as a heathen Chinee! If I don't watch you you'll be burning joss-sticks yet, in front of your God of Chance!"

The man turned to look out over the big queer city. "I don't know but that I ought to," he replied, with the same peculiar smile.

Suddenly the girl's bantering tone disappeared.

"Jack," she said slowly, "how long did you say you had been out here, in the East?"

"Let me see." The man pondered a second. "Twelve—thirteen years."

"But don't you hate to leave it? Don't you think you'll find home awfully dull after all that time out here?"

"I expect I will, at first." There was a trace of soberness in his voice. "The Coast out here does sort of get a hold on you, doesn't it?"

The girl nodded, and her lips trembled slightly with her next words.

"Jack, dear, I'm afraid you're not going to be happy away from all this. It's going to be so dreadfully quiet in that little town of ours."

"Why, Mary, of course I'll be happy! I wouldn't be happy anywhere, away from you, would I?" His voice sounded very frank and truthful, and he reached over and drew her hand into his with a most reassuring little squeeze. Nevertheless, there was just a trace of wistfulness in his eyes when he finally drew them away from the smooth curves of the distant pagodas and forced them onto the wharf at their feet.

Down there the people were drawing back from the dock edge, and handkerchiefs were beginning to flutter. The steamer was drawing slowly away from the dock; already a dozen feet of dark water lay between her lofty sides and the glistening piles of the pier.

Suddenly there was a commotion on the dock. Through the fringe of the crowd burst a Chinese boy, clad in the

usual white of the middle class. He ran to the very edge of the pier and then, looking up, he began to scan the faces at the rail anxiously. His arm went quickly back and a small package came flying through the air to land with a little thud on the steamer deck. Then the boy stood on the dock, grinning cheerfully upward.

The girl in the blue serge picked up the package as it fell at her feet. Out of it slipped a beautiful fan, elaborately pictured and wonderfully carved. Placing it in her lap, the girl leaned over the rail. As she did so, her companion grasped her arm with a grip of iron.

"I say—who is that? That Chinese boy?" he demanded excitedly.

For a second the girl did not answer. "Oh, Chong Lee," she called down at the grinning boy. "Chong Lee! Thanks ever so much. I'll just love it—and think of you often! And Chong Lee—tell them all 'good-bye' for me: the Mission School, and the Big Red Doctor, and Mother Huen Chen!"

Then when the boy nodded, grinning, she turned to her companion again.

"Why, Jack," she said severely, "I almost believe you're jealous! Jealous of poor Chong Lee! Don't you remember the one I told you followed me around all the time, because father pulled him out of the fire? That big pucker on his cheek—that's the fire scar. I told him 'good-bye' once at the Mission, but I might have known he'd follow me down to the boat!" She laughed, a pleased little rippling laugh. "Now are you still jealous of Chong Lee, White Man?"

"No-o-o," denied the man. He looked out over the city again, and smiled. "Do you know," she said slowly, "I'm inclined to believe you're right about that 'luck' business. There isn't so much of this thing called 'Chance' around in the world anyway, is there?"

A QUESTION OF DRESS

By LOUISE RAND BASCOM

Entered in the BLACK CAT *Short Story Contest*

HY did the girl cry? Miss Binner asked herself the question several times as she sat watching the children's boats on the lakelet before her. Such a pretty girl, and her suit was so thin and threadbare! It seemed not quite well bred to look at her, and Miss Binner tried very hard indeed to keep her eyes on the reflected sky in the water; but at an uncontrolled audible outburst, she could stand it no longer. Rising swiftly, she crossed the path to a partly concealed park bench and sank down beside the weeper.

"Now, now," she soothed, putting her arm about the girl. "Now, now."

Oblivious of companionship, the sobbing redoubled, bringing forth further tender admonitions of "Now now" from the diminutive woman in the still more diminutive turban. "Tell me about it," counseled the would-be comforter. "What is it, child?"

"It's him," wailed the girl after an interval of gulping. "It's him. He's goin' with the Jenkins girl. Oh, we was gettin' on so good."

Miss Binner's hand tapped sympathetically on the thin back at her side. "Ah—" she encouraged.

The girl blew her nose and shook out her wet handkerchief in the cold spring sunlight while the tears still coursed down her moist cheeks. "It's her clothes," she observed. "We was gettin' on good. We was goin' to be married, and then she comes along in chic-lookin' models, and Pete can't see me any more. He ain't said so. I can feel it." She paused and swallowed hard. "How she gets 'em I can't see. Her pay's the same's mine. We hold down the very same counter at Bealby and Company's."

"Well," suggested Miss Binner, "if it's a question of clothes, why don't you get some?"

A healthy red mottled the girl's face even under her coating of smudged, transparent rouge. She turned angrily. "Get some!" she almost shouted. "How can I? I can't feed my face on what I'm earning, let alone buy duds. If I could sew I'd be too tired to make 'em after standin' on my feet all day. My feet hurts me awful. I've got corns. I guess it's 'cause my feet's so thin—there ain't enough cushion to keep the leather from rubbing."

A long silence followed. The catbird in the thicket behind carrolled joyously; shouts issued from the children by the water's edge; a terrier yapped incessantly as he romped after sticks.

Miss Binner's heart began to thump. What would her sister say? She could almost hear the staccato-like words, "It don't pay to do nothin' for nobody. They only hate you for it." Perhaps they did, perhaps they did, still— Miss Binner took one of the girl's cold hands in her own small, blue-veined ones.

"Have you enough—could you borrow enough to buy some material?" she ventured at last, somewhat timidly. "My profession is—a—dressmaking and possibly—possibly I could help you out."

"What good would it do?" snapped the girl. "I ain't got the money to pay you."

"I am not asking for pay," corrected

Miss Binner with gentle dignity. "I'm asking to help you. Could you purchase some dress goods?"

A more hopeful light crept into the girl's sombre eyes. "There's Miss Langford," she mused. "She's one of the swells who act as advisers at the Girl's Home where I room. She might lend me a little, but—oh, what's the use?" she sobbed again.

"Now, now," soothed Miss Binner. "Don't, don't."

"It's my corns," groaned the girl. "They aint really corns—they're callouses, but they hurt just as bad. Oh, what shall I do?"

Miss Binner drew a stubby yellow pencil from her pocket somewhat hesitantly. She produced her grocery list with greater firmness and by the time she started to set down the number of her none too pleasant room, she was writing with decision. "Get some materials," she ordered, shoving the bit of paper in the girl's listless hand. "Bring them to me as soon as you can, and we'll see if it's a question of dress."

"Oh, God!" wept the girl, with no signs of gratitude. "It's her clothes." And when Miss Binner left her, the wretched creature was still choking and mumbling.

Miss Binner well knew what would be said when she told her more ignorant and commercially minded sister of the occurrence, and the explosion following her confession was quite as expected.

"Nobody ain't ever done nothin' for us," protested the younger and plumper Miss Binner. "When it comes to us, folks get so stingy they wouldn't give us a match without striking it first, and yet you're always goin' out of your way to do something for somebody. What comes of it? Nothin' but trouble. Here you've come to a new place, and you'd ought to be huntin' customers, and instead you drown your head in a French dictionary and Principles of English and try to make believe you're a lady. Last night you left your supper to go set with the sick woman on the top floor. What good did it do? She only had you waked up at twelve to come back and set the rest of the night. Them notions don't do nothin' but wear you out, and folks dont' think no more of you for 'em."

"I suppose not," admitted Miss Binner, feeding the three gold fish at her elbow. "I don't think I do it for others so much, though, as to get the warm inside feeling it brings. Some folks like one sort of whisky, some another. This sort of thing's my whisky. Besides—the child may not come."

But she did—before the week was out. She brought the material for three dresses. It was all cheap, but the colors were inoffensive. One piece was fawn, another blue, and the third a really attractive shade of green. The cloth was thrown before the little seamstress with a gesture which seemed to say, "Well, let's see what you can do," whereupon the younger and plumper Miss Binner sniffed and almost cut herself with the potato knife.

The park confidante, however, merely passed her tape here and there, making memoranda with the stubby yellow pencil.

"I've decided I want 'em made like—" began the newcomer, but Miss Binner took some pins from her lips to interrupt:

"That is my one condition. I am to make the gowns from my own designs. If they are not satisfactory, I will pay you for the cloth."

To which the girl replied, "Well, if you know so much, go to it. How much longer do I have to stand? My feet's killin' me. I tell you it's awful to stand all day and then have to go to the dressmaker's for fittin's at night. You don't know what it means."

"I told you," averred the plumper Miss Binner when the girl had gone. "Folks only look down on you for helpin' them, and you never do yourself no good." But the little seamstress shut her lips

more firmly and cut some gay buttons from one of her own dresses, digging findings from various bags.

"Thought she was to furnish the stuff," snapped the sister. "You must 'a' paid at least three dollars out o' your own pocket now."

The little seamstress snapped a basting thread and continued her work with apparent placidity. Gravely she snipped and pressed and stitched till the three dresses were finished and delivered. Even their owner's critical gaze softened somewhat as she tried them on for the final time.

"They make me look different," she said with less stridency than usual. "I feel different, too—like I oughtn't to talk loud."

That was all the thanks and all the praise Miss Binner received. The saleslgirl gathered her possessions into a box brought for the occasion and disappeared into the night.

"What did I tell you?" snapped the plumper Miss Binner. "It don't pay to do nothin' for nobody." This refrain was sung for nearly three weeks, with variations such as, "There's nothin' left but three dollars to keep us from the wolf, and part of that's due on the Courier ad. It ain't brought you nothin'. You ought to refuse to pay it."

The answer of the little seamstress on one of these occasions was forestalled by a ring and the appearance of a young woman.

"Miss Binner?" inquired the visitor brightly. "I'm Miss Langford. May I come in?"

The little seamstress merely backed and held the door open. Such velvet and furs she had never seen! Such a satiny skin, such burnished hair, such sparkling eyes! Miss Langford was like the Princess Hildegarde Miss Binner had read about in a youthful fairy book, and she felt awed and dazed.

"So you're the wizard," smiled Miss Langford with winning friendliness. "This is a veritable Love Potion Dispensary, isn't it?"

"What—how do you mean?" quavered Miss Binner, nervously bringing a chair.

"You are modest," commented the newcomer, with a voice so sweet it almost brought tears to Miss Binner's eyes. "You see, I happen to know a little girl who was eating her heart out for the love of a rather worthless young groceryman. She told her story to you, and you somehow found her real soul down under her cheap little exterior and gave it its real habit."

"Ah," interrupted Miss Binner eagerly. "Did the man return to her?"

"That's the joke," smiled Miss Langford. "He came back, but she didn't want him. In the meantime, she attracted another chap—a nice one. It seems to have been a question of clothes. They were creations, Miss Binner."

"Not that," murmured Miss Binner reddening. "The material was too slimsy I couldn't do much. I—"

"I think you're dear," commented the girl, leaning forward in her chair. "And I'm so interested in your love potions I've come to see you about a cousin of mine. She's very plain and doesn't know her style. Nobody else has seemed to catch it. After seeing what you did to Adelaide, I'm wondering if you couldn't find my cousin's true self and arrange it in appropriate garb. She wants a husband and has been out three years. She's a dear thing, but there's something wrong with the outside. May I send her around to-morrow?"

"Why, yes," gasped Miss Binner. "Why, of course," and she followed her caller to the door in a trance, smelling intangible perfumes and walking among imaginary flowers.

She was brought back to reality by the sharp voice of the plumper Miss Binner. "She never said a word about pay. I could see it in her eyes she meant to take advantage of you. Things ought

to be down in black and white. I'll work so many hours for so much. I'll have to get cash in advance for the findin's. You're too careless and easygoing, Alicia. You let folks use you. They do it every time. I've lived forty-two years and nobody's never done nothin' for me yet. I know what I'm talkin' about."

But Miss Binner merely leaned over and fed the gold fish. "Wasn't it nice about the little store girl?" she queried absently. "I never saw anybody cry so. It was dreadful!"

"Pshaw!" sniffed the plumper Miss Binner. "Nobody but an imbecile would cry over a man! Are you going to get supper, or am I?" She took down the blue onionware dishes from the narrow closet over the tiny enamel washbowl. "I reckon I'd better. You're moonin' so, you'd burn up the chops, and we can't afford to ruin 'em."

A gas jet spurted, water swished in the basin, steam began to sing in a small blue kettle, and the spit and sizzle of meat added itself to the other sounds. Suddenly the cook broke into cynical laughter. "The idea of you findin' anybody's soul," she snickered. "La, ain't these folks with limousines funny?"

As usual, the little seamstress was dreaming and failed to hear. Before her faded vision floated Hildegarde and the Prince. The cousin must be one of the ladies-in-waiting. She wondered what she would be like, and could scarcely wait for the morrow to see her.

As she had expected, the cousin was as a brown toadstool to a lily when compared with Miss Langford, but Miss Binner measured her carefully, padded out a form with infinite care, and sat thinking, thinking long before she touched scissors and thread. That night she was too excited to sleep. It was so important Miss Langford should be pleased. The "well done" of a Princess Hildegarde would mean more to her romance-starved life than the clink of gold pieces. It would be wonderful, too, if her gowns could bring a lover to that quiet gray cousin—a lover with a warm arm and still warmer lips. Miss Binner's breast heaved a little and a glad thrill tingled in her veins. She could scarcely wait for the outlines of the window to emerge from the crepuscular light in order to resume her work, but the sound of clanking milk bottles ultimately filled her restless ears and her feverish fingers groped for a needle. For days she labored thus with anxious heart and eager hands till the mushroom's costumes were ready to wear.

"We'll get thrown out of here for the rent ef you don't get 'em done and collect on 'em," snapped the plumper Miss Binner, but the little seamstress was thinking only of the Princess Hildegarde. She did not see the green check the mushroom left on the table. She did not hear the mushroom's quiet, "I can't tell you how satisfied I am, Miss Binner"; but Miss Langford's merry, "Oh, you wizard, you!" rang in her ears like a triumphant march.

"You'd ought to have stuck out for the cash. How d'ye know this check's any good?" demanded the plumper Miss Binner the moment they were alone. "People will do you every time for being so easy. I'm going to put my hat right on an' take this to the bank." The plumper Miss Binner reached for a black hat with a small purple plume and set it on her sleek, round head. "It ain't much of a check," she grumbled. "I should think rich folks like that would have doubled your price. You ask too little. There's no use workin' for prices of before the Civil War when sugar's twenty-three cents a pound and chops are three for forty-five cents. Whatever the price, though, you'll not see the money, and that's the last of the folks."

It was not the last of the folks, however, for Miss Langford herself came next, her chauffeur loaded with bundles. "Miss Binner," she began shyly when the man had withdrawn, "I am to be married

in three months, and I've decided I want you—just you, to make my trousseau—will you? Somehow, I feel as though it would bring me luck!"

The tremor passing over the beautiful figure at her side communicated itself to Miss Binner, and she felt her own stiff knees trembling with excitement. When one has never had a love affair of one's own, it is pleasant to share those of others, and Miss Binner felt very near to this one. "Will I?" she breathed. "I'll be as happy as if it were my own," and she saw the quick tears of sympathy gush to Miss Langford's eyes and knew the girl was wishing that she, poor little faded thing that she was, might be as happy.

"You would like him so," murmured the Princess Hildegarde. "He's so handsome—magnificent teeth and hazel eyes that always laugh, and—" she hesitated and laughed herself. "I once thought that when the time came I'd not be silly like my friends have been about *their* engagements, but Harold is so big and honest and brave I can't help being proud and happy—and wanting to tell about it," she added, a trifle defiantly.

"That's as it should be, dearie," declared Miss Binner, and Miss Langford pressed her arm with gratitude.

"I have brought down some materials I want you to use, and you may look them over and plan before my fitting," the girl continued. "When may I come?"

"Saturday at ten," replied Miss Binner dreamily.

When she was alone, she caught up the bundles, placed them tenderly on the somewhat battered table and began opening them much as a child takes wrappings from his Christmas toys. Such wonderful things as there were! Silver laces, Oriental embroideries, royal blue chiffon and rich brocades, indigo satin, cerise-shot gauze, Persian voile, coral taffeta, jeweled nets, cream silk crepons, and so many other colors and textures spread themselves before Miss Binner that she began to cry and hurriedly turned away lest she spoil the costly fabrics before her. Was she, an obscure seamstress in a new city, to make up all these marvelous things? The responsibility seemed almost too great, and yet—yet if she could, her stitches would be finer than any great grandmother's, and she knew, with one of those flashes which sometimes come to genius, that no modiste could outrival the trousseau which she would create for Miss Langford. It would be as if she were making her own garments with stitches of love and prayers of hope, and she drew her tired body erect with a new sense of power. Long after she should have been asleep that night, she lay sketching mental pictures of the gowns she would make.

What blissful days followed! The robins sang and the flowers bloomed and Miss Binner's needle magically transformed straight lengths into folds of infinite beauty. On Sunday she walked many blocks to the big gray church where Miss Langford went, and, climbing to a dark corner of the balcony, gazed down raptly on the fashionable congregation and especially at the Langford pew, where her Princess Hildegarde sat, often accompanied by a straight young man whom Miss Binner instinctively knew to be "Harold." When he bent toward his fiancee with the black hymnal, Miss Binner felt a little thrill shooting up her own flat back, and when the young fellow's eyes fell upon Miss Langford's bright face, Miss Binner's cheeks grew pink. Before church was quite over, she silently slipped away and hurried home past hedges of box and hollyhock and tall iron fences. She knew the plumper Miss Binner would attempt to spoil the morning with her chatter, but what did it matter? She knew the inevitable monologue by rote.

"Been throwin' another quarter to the saints, huh? Well, you'll get nothin' back for it. I see no sense in your ex-

travagance. You'd think you had a steady job instead of not knowing where your next nickel was comin' from. I stayed home and did this bastin' for you while you was traipsin' aroun'."

But Miss Binner did not mind her sister's cynicism, for she lived with but two thoughts. One was to make the most beautiful gowns possible, and the other was to see Miss Langford's sweet and expressive face.

And then in the midst of Miss Binner's contentment and joy, Miss Langford ceased to smile. Her eyelids were tinged with blue, and though she still carried her head as erect as ever, she seemed preoccupied and distressed. Half a dozen times Miss Binner opened her lips to ask, "What's the matter, dearie—not feeling well?" but she refrained.

"Don't think Miss Langford's satisfied," her sister tormented. "I kinder think she's going to take the work somewhere's else, and you'll not get paid for what you've done so far. You're so sure of yourself."

Ah, why hadn't she inquired the trouble? To evade sisterly pin pricks, Miss Binner conceived a trip to Bealby and Company's for some lining. She was too hurried to eat her lunch, and the walk in the air was not bracing because her mind was harassed with worried questionings. The store was hot and unusually crowded. She was forced to wait longer than usual for attention and again for her parcel and change. When it was possible to start for home, an unreasoning impulse seized her to go down to the notion counter and speak to Adelaide, but upon reaching it she found Adelaide in deep and excited conversation with another girl. Their young voices rose higher and higher, while Miss Binner stood hesitating whether to interrupt them.

"That's her," said Adelaide. "She threw him down once, they say. Now he's got engaged to Miss Langford she's tryin' to get him back. She tags him everywheres, and she's rich to boot. He don't know where he's at."

Miss Langford! The Princess Hildegarde! So that was why! The excitement of the girls bore no comparison to that now experienced by the little seamstress. She tried to look in the direction which held the eyes of the girls, but a strange iciness was creeping over her trembling knees. Her heart was literally in her mouth. The store seemed far, far away; her head larger and heavier than her frail body. The next she knew, a masculine voice, apparently speaking from inside her brain, began to boom, "Take her to my office and get the spirits of ammonia." Later she felt something going down her throat; air from an open window blew across her face; her hands were being rubbed, and she could hear the chink-clink of ice in a bag.

"That will do, Miss Hughes," said a man's voice suddenly. "You may return to your work. Miss Wendell and I will look after her."

Miss Binner struggled to open her eyes, but was too inert. The rubbing of her hands continued, or rather the rubbing of one hand. That was in the vigorous clasp of a man. The other was held in the unsympathetic palm of a woman, and before Miss Binner's eyes opened she experienced the desire to free herself from that grasp.

"But why not, Harold?" demanded a voice harshly. "You loved me once. You can't have changed. You told me you never would. You're marrying this Langford girl for spite. Why ruin our lives? Oh, Harold, look at me."

"But, Helen," protested the man, "but—"

"But I want to do the honorable thing," mimicked the girl. "Is it honorable to break my heart? To—"

"You broke our engagement," the man reminded her.

"You know I didn't mean it," stormed the girl. "Look at me. Can you honestly tell me I mean nothing to you?"

Despite the fact that it all seemed very remote—almost in another world—Miss Binner felt the man at her side hesitate. Ah, that must not be! There was desperate need of her. With a tremendous effort, she opened her eyes and said weakly, "Where am I?"

"In my office," replied a kind masculine voice. "This is the manager's office of Bealby and Company."

"Ah," murmured Miss Binner. She was so weak, and she must think so quickly. Her adored Miss Langford loved this man. It was impossible for anybody not to love her, and yet some previous affair was entangling the young fellow. The reason for the blue eyelids and lagging step was now quite clear to the little seamstress, but what could she do? If she were truly a wizard, truly the owner of a love potion, she ought to be able to do something. Again she opened her troubled eyes and looked into those of the Carmen beside her. As she gazed searchingly into that passionate, cruel face some of Miss Langford's first words came back to her. "It's all a question of clothes. Somehow, you found her real soul and gave it its real habit."

The words almost sent her to her feet, weak as she was. If she could only make this woman come to her for a gown! If she could only express through fabrics the real soul as she saw it! If she could only conceive a dress that would shake the scales from Harold's eyes! If—she looked up and smiled wanly.

"I see you in deepest carmine and smoky georgette with a touch of emerald," she said feebly. "It clings, it glows—it—oh, if you would only let me do it."

"The woman's raving!" cried the brunette, stepping back, startled.

"No, madam," pleaded Miss Binner, weakly. "Ah, no. I am a designer—a modiste—a pupil of the great Circely. I long to do a gown for you—long to do it as a painter longs to paint a beautiful woman. I owe it to you for your goodness to me now. If you will only allow me I will do it in three days and you shall pay me nothing. Won't you give me the happiness, madam?"

"The woman's mad," proclaimed the brunette, with a curl of her lips, and yet Miss Binner could see that she was interested.

From every point of view the situation was most awkward, and the man seized upon Miss Binner's suggestion as a life-saver. "You love a sporting proposition, Helen," laughed the young fellow, turning the same profile Miss Binner had so often watched at church by Miss Langford's side. "I dare you to try it. To do the thing up brown, I'll furnish the goods."

"Take you," sparkled the girl, dropping her hand on the man's arm. "Let's go select the stuff."

"We must get a taxi and send this lady home first," the man averred. "You'll take her, Helen, won't you?"

The girl was about to protest, evidently reconsidered, and finally acquiesced, eventually assisting the weak but excited Miss Binner to her door.

"Serves you right," snapped the plumper Miss Binner, as her sister sank groaningly on a couch with explanations. "Serves you right, chasing off a hot day with no lunch. I believe you've gone clean daft over that Langford woman. What you goin' to get out of it? Nothin' but the grave if you're askin' me. There's no use workin' your fingers to the bone for rich folks. They don't thank you for it or even know you've done it. Look at me. Here I am past forty and nobody's never done anything for me yet. Nobody's ever done anything for you, either."

"Keep still," commanded Miss Binner unexpectedly. It was the first time in her life she had ever spoken so sharply, and her sister opened and closed her mouth with incredulity. "It is necessary to think—plan—think," the little seamstress added by way of explanation. "Fit-

ting at nine. Let me see. Tiger, blood, fire, ashes, snake, winding—"

"I do believe you've gone imbecile," cried the plumper sister in real alarm. "Hadn't I ought to go for the doctor? There's no use your runnin' the risk of losin' a week's time. He probably won't be high, anyhow."

The plumper Miss Binner brought out the hat with the purple plume, but the little seamstress protested she wanted a beefsteak rather than a doctor, though she refused food when it was prepared. Her mind was too busy with Carmen and the gown which must show her soul. In order to keep up her strength, she slowly sipped a beaten egg in milk and wondered fearfully if her victim would really come. It would be unbearable to lose her, now the trap was prepared, but there was no need of worry. When Carmen saw how expertly the little seamstress worked, when she observed three dazzling gowns carelessly but cunningly displayed, she came again, and, wonder of wonders, miracle of miracles, wore the dress when she departed on the third day. Little cared she that the two sisters had worked unceasingly on it. It was curious; it was different; it would make people stare, and exclaim. That was all that mattered. She did not know that the gown caught and accentuated her worst qualities—her passion, her greed, her cruelty, her selfishness, her dishonesty!

Would *he* see? Miss Binner prayed that he would.

Days passed. Miss Langford missed three fittings. Carmen did not return. One of the gold fish languished and died; the others swam endlessly round and round. Miss Binner ate less and less. What had happened? Unable to endure the suspense, the little seamstress sneaked away one evening when her sister had stalked to the drug store for a tonic emulsion and sought the colossal stone front of Miss Langford's house. She would ask if the girl were ill. Perhaps she could see the Princess Hildegarde. If so, it would be possible to know at once if she had indeed been a wizard, if the potion had worked. It was a queer night, and she listened to the wind coming in waves from afar off after a long silence like the lull and roar of breakers. A door opened, suffusing with radiance some hydrangeas along the walk. In terror of discovery, Miss Binner turned and stumbled off into the darkness.

When she reached home, she could hear voices in the room, and wondered. Perhaps someone had come down from the top floor. Perhaps her sister had been ill and summoned assistance. Hurriedly she flung open the door and peered in. The first face she saw was that of the plumper Miss Binner, actually smiling. The little seamstress advanced cautiously. Could it be? Yes, it was. Miss Langford! Smiling! And by her side was Harold.

"Here she is," cried Miss Langford gaily, drawing Miss Binner's delicate figure toward her. "Miss Binner, I've brought down my husband. Just think! I put on the very prettiest dress you made me and—he asked me to elope. You must have given me a more wonderful soul than I really have."

She laughed a little hysterically and the big Harold shook Miss Binner's hand. "We've come to ask you to take charge of the dressmaking department at the store, Miss Binner. Can't you report for work to-morrow?"

"Not till she's finished outfitting my soul," protested Miss Langford, but her husband merely placed his hand over her mouth and piloted her out. "To-morrow, Miss Binner," he threw back gaily over his shoulder.

"There's a catch in it somewhere," complained the plumper Miss Binner, but the little seamstress did not hear her. She was dreaming of exquisite love and satins—and pin cushions that were always full of pins with real points.

$.89 WORTH OF DEVOTION

By JAMES HENRY THOMPSON

Entered in the BLACK CAT *Short Story Contest*

PLAYFOOT had never amounted to anything—and he never could. The nineteen years of his life that had passed were an excellent criterion of judgment upon which to make the assertion and the predication. His arrival in the world had awakened interest and responsible affection in but one person; his persistent continuance in the world was tolerated, ignored, by all except one person.

Splayfoot was not the name by which he had been christened. When his mother had stopped from her endless laundry processes, and at a time when convenience provided opportunity, long enough to dip him bodily in a tub of tepid water later thriftily devoted to its original purposes, she had mumbled, "I baptis' y' by the name of Matthew Mark Luke and John Peters." The ceremony of immersion completed according to what she recalled of the Primitive Baptist formula, she rested content that the quadruple apostolic title would have some merit of distinction. Later, when the outward-turned flat feet of the boy marked him more emphatically than his baptismal cognomens, she adopted the more convenient and popular appellation of Splayfoot. The descriptive title was less in derision than disinterest.

Splayfoot was as black as a son of Ethiop may be. His nigrescence was remarkable, sinister, and he ran true to racial form in every particular of his physiognomy: kinky hair, spreading nostrils, receding skull, bulging lips, chalky eyeballs; and in nature he was as innocent and primeval as the beginnings of his people's progression. Mammy and Pappy—Pappy was a legendary parent whose demise had occurred some months prior to Splayfoot's arrival in the world—had been of a line untainted by hybrid blood. His paternal grandparents, by some furtive and transiently zealous Underground Railway, had been cast into the alien isolation and stagnancy of Five Roads, that northern hamlet whose first curious sympathies were soon worn to indifference.

In the heat of first pity for the fugitives, whose deliverance was made to savor of divine interposition, the little community had set aside and legally deeded to them an acre or two of easily-spared land and helped to erect there a sheltering cabin. The children of the original donors had forgotten by what title Splayfoot's mammy held his birthplace.

There are great disadvantages concerned with being alien to a community, either through misfortune of birth or unalterable and inherent endowments of character. The smaller the minority in which aliens find themselves the greater the disadvantages. Splayfoot and his mammy were the only negroes in a wide Caucasian radius about Five Roads. The bars of sympathy that had lifted momentarily with the engrossing adventure of the Underground Railway had been dropped long since, and not after Pappy had gone through them to fetch Mammy to share his loneliness had the interlopers upon racial singularity pretended any intrusion. Participation in

society, religion, education, affection, was denied Splayfoot. He didn't amount to anything, nor could he.

Splayfoot was not lazy; industry had been whipped into his blood by long-dead and stern taskmasters. He sensed in some hazy way that he had a share in the primal curse, and his labor took form in employment as porter for Mammy's washings and in his difficult scrapings of the infertile earth of their scant acres. The roots and tubers he managed to entice to growth in the arid clay sometimes made a hoard of food sufficient to prevent his and Mammy's hunger during the fallow months; sometimes they went hungry. But whatever his industry or necessity, it never was permitted to touch the life of the community about him. Tradition said Splayfoot was worthless as a laborer, and the Five Roads had accepted tradition's dictum, unquestioning, and never gave Splayfoot opportunity to prove or display his worth.

Matthew Mark Luke and John Peters and the mother who had so christened him without benefit of jealously-inaccessible clergy were as insulated as their progenitors had been on the Guinea Coast before white avarice seized them for its uses and gave its racial pride the vaunting, arrogant splendor that so exactly becomes the convenience of Aryan impudence—the Caucasian mystery.

Mammy was older; she had known companionship of her own kind—the fervid passion of their religion, the simple crudity of their regards. To her maternal love was added the force of yearning for her people. Splayfoot knew none other of his race than Mammy, and his filial devotion was poured unmixed from a cup of unselfishness. To Mammy he was still the picaninny she had nursed so fiercely and crooned to so tenderly. Her toil-wearied arms ached toward him and he accepted their straining caresses and returned them with desirous ardor. The world was a desolate place for them except as they found each other in it.

Wily and politic assessors had contrived to impose upon the estate of Splayfoot and his Mammy taxes far in excess of what they should be and had wisely accompanied their levy with the lenient provision that Splayfoot might work out the assessment. Completely satisfied that his labor was the recompense he must make for the privilege of existence and not questioning that taxation might entitle him to other prerogatives of citizenship, Splayfoot, armed with a rusty hoe, plodded stolidly over many miles of township roads, smoothing the tracks and removing from the highways the stones that had worked to the surface.

Orson Oakes, smugly, unctuously exhaling his odor of sanctity, walked with Splayfoot; commanded him, drove him. Orson's hoe was merely a symbol, his pretended labor a sullen protest against his conception of injustice. He believed taxes, especially road taxes, with their attendant communal labor, should be visited upon such menials as Splayfoot. Orson was in continual revolt against social system that obligated him, and in continual agreement with the demands of society upon others.

Because talk was essential to him, he preferred talk with a silent, acquiescent listener rather than with a voluble, disputatious conversationalist. Orson intermixed his brusk orders to Splayfoot with dissertations that he intended should be morally uplifting, and unconsciously, indelicately, outlined the composite attitude of Five Roads toward its racial noncomformists. As he always did, he introduced many scriptural allusions to support his expediencies.

"The curse of Canaan is upon y', Splayfoot," he asserted. (Dig them dead leaves out o' that culvert!) 'Servants be subject to your masters with all fear.' (Y' missed a stone there!) 'Thou shalt not oppress a servant that is poor and

needy whether he is a stranger that is in the land within thy gates.' (Fill up that rut!) Noah cursed the sons of Ham, an' y'r road taxes is part o' that curse."

"You is cussed with taxes, too," mildly suggested the negro.

"'The servant shall do the master's bidding without question,'" admonished Orson. "Better smooth down that thank-y'-ma'am a little."

"Funny, ain't it, Mista Oakes, they lets me work t' pay taxes, but don' never let me work for money."

"Everyone according to his taxation," obscurely answered Orson. "You can live, Splayfoot, 'thout money. 'Wherefore spend ye money for that which is not bread?'"

"Lawdy, Mista Oakes! Mammy she bake bread, but she has to earn money t' buy flour. Seems like I'd 'preciate some money so's I could buy Mammy a present 'casionally, jes' t' show her how I thinks on her. Seems like 'tain't nat'ral not to give Mammy no presents, Mista Oakes."

"'Gifts differ accordin' to the grace that is given us,'" quoted Orson. "(Clean out that ditch!) Give accordin' to y'r means, Splayfoot, an apple or something like that."

"I fixed up some hick'ry nuts las' Chris'mas with some red bittersweet. I ain't never give Mammy a reg'lar present—yet."

"'Twasn't so intended or 'twould be," asserted Oakes with sublime fatalism. "Y' ain't like reg'lar folks, Splayfoot. Tamp down that clod!"

"Ain't presents for niggers? Seems like I feel like givin' presents t' Mammy."

"What's provided 's provided," evaded Orson. "Drain that mudhole!"

"Wisht 't could be provided so's I could get my hands on money."

"Now look here, Splayfoot, don't you get ungrateful. Ain't we give you a home an' land an' let y' live here? Y' ought to be thankful y' ain't a slave." Orson allowed himself a moment of righteous choler.

"Mammy tells how in slave times the mas'rs used to make big times f'r the niggers."

"Well, don't we give you and y'r ma all the things we don't want? Hoe some gravel into that sink hole!"

"Spec' I oughter be satisfied, but I jes' pine t' get Mammy a reg'lar present some time."

Orson looked at his watch, a thing he had done with hopeful frequency all day. "'Tain't quite quittin' time yet, but 'twill be by th' time we get home, so we'll call it a day. I'll give y' seven hours on y'r taxes, Splayfoot, an', seein' I'm sort o' bearin' the responsibility, I'll mark up ten f'r me. You carry my hoe."

The slant rays of the early spring sun failed to banish the chill from the afternoon air and the two men, black and white, walked briskly to keep up circulation, Splayfoot always a pace in the rear and swinging his feet grotesquely. Once he again broached the subject that dominated his desires:

"Spec' y'r li'l girl's goin' t' give you presents, Mista Oakes?"

"She always does. She's savin' now. Keeps all her pennies in her bank on the kitchen shelf." Orson was touched by humanness with the reference to his daughter.

"Spec' she don' have to earn money?"

"Oh, yes. She is paid for feedin' the chickens."

"Lawdy, Mista Oakes, I'd do more'n that f'r some pennies! I got two I saved, but they won't get much."

"They ain't no work here, Splayfoot, an' folks can't afford to pay f'r what they don't need. 'Sides you ain't no good workin', anyway."

"Spec' that's 'cause I never had no chanst. Wisht I could go where's work."

"Why don't you?"

"Can't leave Mammy."

Splayfoot separated from his fellow worker where the unkempt lane led from

the main road to the detached acres where stood his and Mammy's cabin. "Good night, Mista Oakes. Spec' maybe someday things 'll be all right," he said in the exaltation of spirit that always came to him when the cabin and Mammy were near . . . Sanctuary. And Orson Oakes, his pietism sufficient unto his conscience, quoted back from his unfailing store of expediency, " 'Be content with such things as ye have,' " and added abstractedly and so low that Splayfoot did not hear the words, " 'For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth.' "

Up the path went the negro, swinging his uncouth feet, and burst into song, an ancient hymn that Mammy had taught him. His song was signal, assurance, comfort. It was pitched in the five-toned scale that has voiced the heartaches of the world since time and music began:

"Lord, take me over Jordan
To mah Jesus' camp groun'.
Ise ole and full o' trouble,
Ise pore an' weak an' sinful.
Lord, take me over Jordan
To mah Jesus' camp groun'.
I wants to be wid Jesus,
An' Sodom an' Gomorrah.
Lord, take me over Jordan
To mah Jesus' camp groun'."

Mammy was used to join in the plaintively rising chorus, but to-night no song came from the cabin to join Splayfoot's melody. Some indefinable and ominous premonition was in the silence of the place; it seized upon the black boy and filled him with the great physical and moral dread that afflicts his simple race. His song was choked short, and many times his shaking, fearful hand reached for the latch of the door before he found courage to open it.

The kinky hair of his head grew brittle with awe of the miracle of death, and then panic-fright was mingled with the whelming grief that swept him. For there was Mammy, crumpled, huddled, beside her washtubs, so pitifully collapsed that it did not need his shrinking touch upon her cold flesh to tell him that Mammy had gone—*over Jordan.* Some sudden malady had stricken her, painlessly, as she worked.

Splayfoot was ashy with terror. His calamity was so unpredicted, so hopeless, so cruel that he was shorn of resolution, left inarticulate, fatuous, incapable of formative reason. His was the terror of desolation, the stark despair of being alone, the numb impotency, inappetence, of deprivation of all contacts with the past and future. In despair he dashed from the cabin, motivated by subconscious propulsion towards possible sympathy and help. His flapping feet carried him to Orson Oakes.

Incoherent, blubbering, desperate, Splayfoot made Orson understand what had happened. He clung to the allegory of his song; the only words distinguishable from the chaos of his agony were *Mammy—over Jordan.*

Oakes was irritated. He was yet without his supper and hunger was more compelling than compassion. "Wait till I eat, Splayfoot. Have to get the poormaster, I suppose," he said, none of condolence in his voice.

Splayfoot sat, his muscles collapsing, heavy, like so much jelly, and waited while Orson ate a deliberate meal. The negro was too paralyzed by the cataclysmic blow to weep; he was robbed of volition and reason. It is doubtful if he was conscious of the unconscionable time Orson took for his supper.

Delayed consideration prompted Orson's colorless wife to invite the negro to the kitchen for a plate of food. He ate dumbly, bolting his unconsidered meal like a dog. Orson's daughter watched him curiously, with the detached wonder of a child. Her father came into the kitchen, coated and with his hat on. "Come on, Splayfoot; we'll go," he said, as if he was directing commencement of another day of road tax labor.

"I want my chicken pay," demanded the little girl inappropriately. Orson gave her some pennies and she let them drop, clinking, into the iron bank that she replaced on a shelf. Orson went out and Splayfoot followed, his feet gangling, ineffectual.

Oakes maintained a sullen resentment toward the negro as though Splayfoot were to blame for subjecting him to a distasteful task. At the cabin he forced the orphaned boy with abuse and harsh words to lift Mammy to a disordered bed, and covered her with a sheet damp from the washing.

"She'll have to be buried," he said, and his words plainly implied that sanitation made imperative what otherwise would be of no consequence. "I'll 'phone the poormaster. He probably won't come till morning. Good night, Splayfoot." And he left the cabin abruptly, with no advice, no comfort, no further offer of help. Splayfoot crouched in a dark corner of the cabin, most distant from the bed.

After a time he stirred from his inertia and began to set the little room to rights. The washing in the tubs he completed, fulfilling the duty that Mammy had left unfinished, and he found satisfaction in that. Then he emptied the tubs, set them away and swept the floor. In apathetic deliberation he arranged neatly every detail of the room, striving to make his tasks consume as much time as possible.

The cheap alarm clock ticked slowly. The smoky oil lamp burned dimly. Light and swift-passing time might have allayed his terrors, but in the cabin were only haunting shadows that leaped and sneaked out of corners and played cruel tricks, and the dragging, oppressing silence measured by the slow ticks of the clock. Splayfoot wound the clock until he broke its spring, then time stretched longer than before. He was left with only the dim, guttering light for company, and the pursuing phantom shadows. He filled the lamp and measured carefully his reserve of oil; he knew that total darkness would be unbearable. A rat began gnawing in a corner. The noise was a relief.

Strange phantasms obsessed him: once he fancied that a bulky shadow over the washtubs was Mammy rubbing there as she sometimes had of nights. He watched the illusion closely, hopefully, wistful that it might take clearer form. He knew that ghosts would be less fearful than this implacable presence he could not see nor define and against which he was so utterly helpless. He painfully, resolutely, kept his eyes averted from the bed.

The unyielding fever of fear that possessed Splayfoot brought with it delirium; his mind was unstable and held to no purpose; trivial things — arranging and re-arranging the ornaments of the room, souvenirs of Mammy—could not divert him. Then he babbled, wildly and without form at first, snatches of unconnected, half-remembered phrases, bits of folk song, refuse of memory. He found comfort in his vocality, the sounds whose origin he could understand assured him, dispelled the terror-burdened silences, and he talked faster and louder. As his lunacy was abated his ramblings began to take form, and he contrived a collocutor with whom he might discuss his returning reasonings; reversion to habit looked to it that it should be Mammy, with whom he was most used to discuss his topics.

"Spec' you'm happy now over Jordan. . . . Spec' they's other black folks there. . . . Comp'ny for you. . . . You lef' me in an awful fix. . . . I can't wash. . . . Folks says I'm no 'count. . . . I'm goin' 'way from here. . . . Got to work out them road taxes first. . . . Cuss o' Canaan. . . . 'Twa'n't only las' night you was singin' t' me. . . . Now look at y'! . . . Ain't got 'nother frien' on earth. . . . Was tryin' an' wishin' t'-day to get somethin' f'r y' a present. . . . Now you went and gone. . . . Spec'

you ain't got no frien's here neither. . . . Only me. . . . I'm a frien'. . . . Spec' Ise jes' got to do it. . . . Ise feared, Mammy . . . Ise feared!"

His conversation bolstered Splayfoot's courage, obscured his terror, and he drew nearer the bed, whispering in awe. He had conjured back the living presence of Mammy so convincingly that her body became less fearsome. He pulled back the damp sheet and dared a view of the placid ebony features. Soon he was kissing the lips in a passion of poignant sorrow.

"Oh, Mammy, youse got your old wash dress on. . . . 'Tain't right. . . . Folks oughter be dressed up when they's dead. . . . Never min', Mammy . . . I'll fix you. . . . Clean clo's an' flowers. . . . White . . . Red calico don' seem right. . . . 'Sides it's wet. . . . Oughter be dry an' clean. . . . Clean clo's an' flowers. . . . Wisht I had money. . . . Allus did want to buy Mammy a present. . . . Mos' too late now."

Splayfoot searched the cabin for a proper shroud. Mammy's wardrobe was small and limited to her needs; it held only loose, gayly-colored, durable wrappers. Splayfoot cast them aside.

"You sure didn't spec' t' go over Jordan. . . . Else you'd had some white clo's. . . . Spec' I got to contrive someway. . . . Clean clo's an' flowers. . . . Jes' got t' have 'em."

From the shelf over the stove Splayfoot took a bunch of dried, dusty bittersweet berries, washed them to brighten their cheerful orange, and laid them on Mammy's breast.

"There's yo' flowers. . . . Clean clo's. . . . That's what yo' need now. . . . Clean clo's. . . . White. . . . Jes' white. . . . Like a clean white chicken."

The association of ideas that had come to Splayfoot's confused brain — clean clothes, present for Mammy, white, chickens—was the germ of a desperate idea. He seized upon the plan as if it were revelation of a vision. Without weighing methods or consequences, he acted.

"I'm goin' 'way for a while. . . . Good night, Mammy. . . . Spec' you'll be all right. . . . I'll leave the lamp a-burnin'."

All night Splayfoot swung his grotesque feet along the country roads, and at daybreak he was waiting for the earliest clerk to open a store in a village eight miles from the cabin at Five Roads. It was noon before he was back at the cabin again, carrying a flat box and a bunch of early spring flowers that had cost him a detour into a woodland.

Meanwhile Orson Oakes had grumblingly succeeded in locating the poormaster of the town. Over the telephone he related the circumstances of the unreasonable bother that had befallen Five Roads and directed speedy and economical disposal of Mammy's body.

"Just a rough box. No need to go to expense," he said. "Nothing but a nigger. Wish the other was out of the way as easy. No, ain't no need to bother the parson. Yes; bury her right there. Save time and money. Taxes are high enough now. No; we can do it ourselves. Don't need undertaker. To-morrow? All right. Make it early. I've got other work to do. I'm going to charge my time up against Splayfoot's taxes. Early to-morrow morning. Be lookin' for you. Good-night."

When Splayfoot returned from his night mission and pushed through the cabin door that stood open and entered the little familiar room, elated, pulsing with tender consciousness of tribute to devotion, he found Orson Oakes and another whom he knew to be the constable of the town seated, feet elevated to Mammy's table, grimly waiting. The floor he had so carefully cleaned was filthied with tobacco juice.

Splayfoot cast a first glance to the disordered bed—empty.

"Where's Mammy?" he asked in breathless apprehension.

"Out there," snapped Orson, pointing through the door where a rough, uneven mound of fresh-turned earth had escaped Splayfoot's attention.

"You—?" the negro began a question, accusing, half crying.

Orson interrupted him. "Look here, Splayfoot! What do you know about this?" He exhibited the broken remains of a child's iron bank. The constable swung down his feet and arose from his chair, deliberate, ready, menacing.

"They was some lef', Mista Oakes. I only spent eighty-nine cents for a clean waist f'r Mammy. I jes' had to have it. I'll work it out."

Orson made an angry gesture toward Splayfoot. "Give it to me!" he commanded. He counted the pennies that the negro handed him. "Twenty-seven. That's right. Give me the waist. It ain't been dirtied yet."

Splayfoot never amounted to much and he never could. Perhaps that was the reason the justice meted out to him was a sentence infinitely out of proportion to the pettiness of his crime. Perhaps that was why Five Roads had no patience to examine his impulses and allowed its indignation to become so righteously inflamed against him. A negro robbing a white child of its pennies! Decent folks must protect their loved ones! There was much talk of love and affection and devotion to family. Perhaps that was why the people of Five Roads were called to remember the unpunished precedents that have so viciously set their standards of inhuman penalties for crimes against white blood.

Faggots, ropes, guns!

Splayfoot didn't amount to much, anyway. He never could.

A LITTLE HEAP OF ASHES

By EDWIN HEIMBACH

Entered in the BLACK CAT *Short Story Contest*

THE world changed for John Olgren in one day, the longest day between two suns that he had ever lived or ever expected to live. Each hour of that day seemed of an interminable length, the very minutes were hours, the hours, days. Olgren passed through the earlier hours of the day heroically, and that afternoon, in a far corner of the Richmond, a corner where the velvet hangings were drawn close, where the music of a nearby orchestra sounded like a dirge to the dead, he drank to the health of Luke Durian and his bride, drank in the depths of soul anguish to their never-ending happiness and success.

There is tragedy in death; but a tragedy of life through means of a futile love is a pitiable thing, merciless and killing. So was Olgren's tragedy of life a pitiable thing, not because of the tragedy but because of the man, broken in body, soul distorted, life made valueless.

Olgren drank to the health of Durian and his bride, the wine tasting like gall to his lips, the words of his toast as bitter as gall. Somehow, in Olgren's darkest hour of life, his mind became retrospective, and reverted back to events in which Elsie Burr held supreme place. He remembered the night of yesterday, when, like a drowning man snatching at a straw, he had asked Elsie to reconsider him, to give him a chance. She had turned him away playfully, chiding him for having made such a proposal.

"But I love you," Olgren remembered having whispered in return.

"And I love Luke," had been the reply.

One more incident Olgren recalled of that never-to-be-forgotten night, the only thing which went to make up for the many things denied and lost. She had given him a rose, red as her lips, and she had sweetened the rose with a kiss. She had placed it in the lapel of his coat, her face near to his, the perfume of her hair setting his desires afire. A dying thing by which to remember a deathless love.

Up to the last hour Olgren had nourished a hope in his heart that fate would be kind to him. But the final hour had slipped away, and now, to Luke Durian, belonged the one woman.

The thought of this drove Olgren into a frenzied madness. He must forget. He must be made to forget. Something must be given to take the place of what had been taken, some woman in whose company his madness could be controlled.

So like a bedlamite Olgren began a restless searching of the streets of the city, and late in the afternoon, in a fashionable tea-room, he found the woman.

It was breaking dawn when Olgren alighted from a taxi in front of his apartment house. Ghost-like in the pale sickly light of the morning, he stole up to his rooms. He had played the fool's part in believing that another woman could drive the torturing desire for the other out of his heart, as if such a thing were possible in the wide, wide world.

Not a minute of the afternoon had that little voice within him been at rest,

always a calling and calling for the woman denied. Strange eyes were not Elsie's eyes, nor did the strange laugh, and smiles and ways, belong to her. They were different, foreign, hateful. One woman only possessed the genuine and she was — Luke's. God! Why couldn't he forget? Wasn't there some way of delivering his soul from this visionary torture? Wasn't there some balm for his wounds, some method for stilling that Gorgonian spirit within him?

For days following Olgren kept to his rooms, seeing no one with the exception of his man Stiles, who waited on him day and night, realizing, probably, in a half-learned manner, the reasons for his master's mental and physical sufferings.

Upon the third day of his recluse Olgren wrote a letter to Elsie Durian, and in a flight of fancy, provoked partly by the darker thoughts of life giving way to the lighter, he enclosed the rose which she had given to him the night before her marriage.

For two days Olgren waited for a reply, and upon the day following a letter was delivered to him in his library. He opened it, hands a-trembling, face as white as the ivory ornaments adorning his mantlepiece. The envelope contained a little monogramed card upon which was written the following:

"Dear friend John, you ask the impossible."

By these few words was Olgren's romance shattered, his desire for further participation in the affairs of women destroyed, so far as marriage was concerned. He had lost faith in womankind. From now on, Olgren vowed, as he held the letter to the flames in his fireplace, that broken thing which he called a heart would find no place for love, his life would have no time for the seeking of the same.

Years passed swiftly by and Olgren lived up to his vow. He had found no time, no desire for love. He liked the companionship of women, that was true, but, as he had often put it to himself, he must meet women, he must dabble in their society in order to keep young.

No woman found in Olgren a confidante. He kept his feelings to himself, the feelings that hurt, the feelings that drove contentment out of his heart. For Olgren the splendor of womanhood was gone. Here and there he met up with a woman who compared in a way with Elsie Durian. But in his hours of retreat the balances would not weigh equally. All the virtues of womanhood would not count against the woman of his heart.

In a way it required diplomacy and falsehood for Olgren to quiet the tongues of his set, to keep his life's disaster from becoming the common gossip of drawing rooms. That he was successful toward this end is shown by the number of doors open to his entry. Femininity craved for him in their homes, the menfolks putting up with the capricious fancies of their wives and daughters so long as the lion kept the temper of the lamb.

Once Olgren had been heard to say, "Love is a destroying fire. I have kept my fingers out of the fire." Thus he lied to side-step a truth which someone probably tried to force him to confess.

One night, six or seven years later, Luke Durian's wife called to see Olgren at his apartments. It was at an early hour of the evening and Olgren was in his library reading. Olgren directed his man to show Mrs. Durian into the library. During the few moments of waiting for his caller to put in her appearance Olgren was seized with a distressing feeling of having come again to a cross-road in his life.

Elsie Durian was finally ushered into the library. The door closed behind her. For the first time since the days of his unforgotten past, Olgren found himself alone with the woman into whose hands he had at one time placed the keeping of his life.

He asked her to be seated. She was nervous. He could see that she was by the extreme trembling of her hands and the wild roving of her eyes about the room. She was in fear of something, of somebody. Under the scrutiny of Olgren's eyes she tried to bring herself together but failed, her feelings being so much stronger than her will to force obedience.

"You understand? You know?" she asked.

"I know that you need help," Olgren replied.

Suddenly she spoke up. "You remember the letter?" she inquired

Her question burnt into Olgren's mind. The letter? There had been so many letters that he had written to her, friendly letters and love letters. But there had been one! Good God! That letter had held both life and death for him. He had taken a big chance in the writing of it, a last throw for happiness. Now, after all these years, the letter had come back to him with all of its evil, come back to threaten the very foundations of his reconstructed life. He turned to the woman.

"Did you destroy the letter as I asked?" demanded Olgren.

She met his eyes with an appeal. "You asked the impossible," she returned. "I knew that your way was the best way to follow. Still I wanted to keep the letter. It was yours. What you wrote you should have spoken with your lips. I did not think that you cared for me so much. I knew that you loved me; but with what kind of love? There are so many kinds. I wanted the letter to keep as a remembrance of you, to read it at times, to make a sweet secret of it."

"Why?" whispered Olgren, his sense of mastery shattered by the wildness of her confession.

"Because I loved you," was the answer. "I, alone, am to blame for what my life is to-day. I should have taken many things into consideration before I became a wife to Luke Durian. I know now that you were the only man, that you should have been the man."

Olgren moved over to her and seized her hands in his. "Is it the truth, Elsie?" he asked. "You loved me—then? You love me—now?"

Elsie nodded her head in reply.

Olgren let loose her hands. "It is too late," he cried out hoarsely. "I cannot rob another man of his right. I might take a chance if I were younger, if the world, for me, was still young. I am old. I have been consumed by a living fire and what is left of me is nothing more than a shell. I have been burnt by the fires of love."

"I do not ask for escape from my misfortune," murmured Elsie. "All that I ask is a closer and dearer friendship. But even our friendship is threatened by the missing letter."

The wild look came back into the woman's eyes, and fear was again written upon her face.

"I have come to tell you that I don't know where it is," she announced.

"Lost or stolen?" asked Olgren, her fears being transmitted to his eyes and face.

"Stolen."

"Sure?"

"Yes. I've always kept the letter in my room. Yesterday, when I opened the drawer of my writing-desk, the letter was gone."

"And Luke?"

"Oh, Luke has been away for a month on business down south."

Olgren asked for permission to smoke, touched a match to a cigarette and began a nervous pacing of the room. Elsie's eyes followed him all the while, watching, wondering. Half an hour passed. He paused close to where she was seated.

"You return home, Elsie," he ordered quietly. "To-morrow afternoon I will drop around. We will start a little sleuth work of our own among your servants.

And don't worry. The letter is almost forgotten, almost history. The folly of an old man's youth ought to mean very little, ought to be easily forgiven."

Olgren saw Elsie to the door. Her hand slipped gently into his.

"Oh, be careful, Jack," she murmured. "The letter bothers me. I fear for you. It would kill me if anything were to happen to you through fault of mine, through my foolishness of years ago."

Olgren laughed lightly. "Everything has a price," he said, "and the price must be paid. I knew that when I wrote you the letter."

Following Mrs. Durian's departure Olgren called his man into the library.

"Stiles," said Olgren, "I rely upon you to keep to yourself any information concerning my visitor of to-night."

"Very well, sir."

"If there are any inquiries let me know."

"I'll do that, sir."

"You may go."

Upon the exit of Stiles from the library Olgren seated himself to figure out the meaning and the besetting peril of the missing letter. It was decidedly not to his liking to look upon the dark side of the affair; but the dark side was there, menacing, forbidding. The love part of the letter was minor. The dangerous ground of the correspondence was the portion wherein he had asked Elsie to leave Luke and to come to him. "For in my love," he had written, "lies the whole of your life. You can make it all or nothing."

Olgren knew and realized that the letter was capable of fostering hate and jealousy, that it might bring death to his door. The complete realization of this fact made Olgren shudder violently. He could not bring himself to think of dying a death of horror; rather, a sweet slipping away into the shadows of an unknown. Toward an early hour of the morning Olgren retired to bed, a man with shattered nerves and mind.

The next evening on the way out of his apartments, Olgren stopped Stiles at the doorway.

"I'm going out," he announced. "Probably won't be back until a late hour. Don't sit up for me, Stiles. I'll let myself in. Good night, Stiles."

"Good night, sir."

Olgren paused at the outer entrance of the apartment building, lighted a cigarette and proceeded to the edge of the pavement, where he waited for five minutes or so until from out the night-time brilliancy of the boulevard a taxi drew up to the curbing. The chauffeur leaned out and threw open the door for Olgren.

"Let me out one block from the Margaret park," Olgren instructed, and seating himself in the car he was whirled away in the night.

At the place directed he alighted, paid off his man, watched him return on his way down town, then went about his own business. He walked the one block that separated him from the park, and upon entering the park he proceeded several hundred yards down a shadowy pathway. Finally, ahead of him, beneath the light of an arc light, he espied a young woman seated upon a bench. As Olgren approached, the woman got to her feet and faced him, and when he was but a few feet from her, she stepped out into the foot path.

"Mr. Olgren?" she asked.

"I'm Olgren," returned Olgren in reply.

"Let's walk a bit," said the woman. "I'm restless."

Olgren fell in at the woman's side, slightly perturbed, yet master of himself in every way. He recalled, as he followed down the pathway, the receipt of her note, the crudity of it, the extreme intimidation that the wording sought to convey. Yet, because of his fear for his own life while the letter remained out of his possession, he had thrown all thoughts of personal safety aside and

had determined to abide by the terms of the note.

So here he was night-walking with an adventuress, a dealer in up-to-date blackmail, but, in spite of all, a woman with brains and a sense of the monetary worth of the goods of her trade.

She was a small woman, coming but up to Olgren's shoulder as they walked, slender, with an animated motion in the swaying of her body, with a peculiar pair of eyes, baffling, mysterious, haunting.

"I've seen you before," muttered Olgren, thinking.

"That's likely," was the reply. "I'm well known to some people."

"Aren't you Paul Martindale's wife?"

"For three weeks. No longer. I was the go-between."

"Oh, I see. Sort of a cat's paw to pull people out of tight holes."

"You've got it. I straighten out the tangles of married life. I solve the mysteries of society's world. I make some people happy, and others unhappy. I'm like a lawyer. I take a case though I know that the party that I represent be as guilty as Cain. And when I take a case my mouth is sealed tight. I play my game up to the taking of life. Then I stop. My hands are clean, though I confess my conscience is a trifle dulled."

"Have you my letter?" he asked.

"Have you the money?" she returned.

Olgren laughed. He stopped in his walk, uncovered a roll of bills, counted off several of large denomination, and handed them to the woman. She took the money out of his hand and slipped it into her purse. Then she gave him an envelope, which he carried up to the light of a lamp bordering the pathway, to examine it. He found that it was no fraud. The letter was the letter of life and death, the foolish letter of a love-crazed man. His again for one thousand dollars! Little enough for the return of the letter into his keeping; in fact, it was the very giving of life back to his body. He would destroy the letter that night. He would make ashes of it. He would take the fear out of his living. He went back to the woman.

"It's O. K., is it?" she inquired.

"We're even," Olgren said.

The woman placed her hand upon his arm.

"If I were you," she whispered, "I'd destroy that evil thing. As long as it remains in the form in which it is, it will be a deadly thing to you, even a fateful thing."

"That happens to be my intention," said Olgren. "But I'd like to ask you who gave you the letter, in whose service you are performing this duty?"

She put her finger to her lips and shook her head.

"I never mention names," she answered. "I'll forward you this information, though. It was a man. He gave me the letter. 'If you can get anything out of him for it,' he told me, 'go ahead. I pity him. He should have known better; but he was in love.' If we are even, why, then you can see me out of the park."

They retraced their steps back to the entrance of the park, and after walking several blocks, the woman halted.

"I'll leave you now," she said. "Remember what I said about the letter. Destroy it. Good night, Mr. Olgren."

"Good night."

Olgren stood and watched the woman disappear in the darkness of the night. more mysterious to him now, after knowing all, than she had been before, more mysterious than any other woman he had ever known.

The evening was young and he felt like walking, and so he ambled on, no place in particular, just to be by himself. In the midst of his walk he chanced upon a little café whose interior struck his fancy. He was not feeling hungry; but the letter bothered him. He had decided to destroy it. Here was a good place wherein to do it, and so he entered.

He took his place in a small booth in the back end of the café, where he ordered a light meal to be brought to him. While waiting for his order, he went out in front to use the telephone. He called a number. Someone answered.

"Call Mrs. Durian to the phone," he commanded.

A few minutes passed.

Then, "Hello! Mrs. Durian? Elsie? . . . . This is John. . . . Yes. I have the letter. Better watch your servants a little closer. And Luke, also. It cost me a thousand to get it back. . . . Oh, I'll tell you all about it to-morrow, if you'll be good enough to lunch with me. . . . At the Roland. . . . One o'clock? All right. Good-bye."

Olgren hung up the receiver and went back to his box. His order was served and waiting. He dismissed the waiter and sat down to smoke a cigarette. Shortly, he drew the letter out of his coat pocket. Upon taking the contents out of the envelope, Olgren found, between the two pages of stationery, the remains of a withered rose, the remembrance given to him years ago by the woman he loved, the dry, faded flower speaking tragically of the love that had withered and died.

His thoughts reverted back momentarily to those long passed days, the days when each new surprise was a promise of love's fulfillment, and each sunset the hope of paradisiacal happiness. The ghost of that dead love called out to Olgren from the depths of his heart, and like a man in a dream he raised the letter and the rose to his lips and kissed them passionately. Again and again he brought his lips in contact with them, the wounds of his heart breaking open afresh to fill his soul with bitterness and grief.

Then with an agonizing effort Olgren crushed the letter and the rose into a crumpled up mass, and placed it upon an empty bread plate. A moment later, he struck a match and set the little ball of paper on fire. The letter burned slowly. The small blue flames crept like the tongues of snakes here and there, until finally they died out in one last effort to retain life, and left a heap of blackened ashes before him.

Olgren sat studying the ashes of the letter. How quickly events changed for the better, thought Olgren. White paper containing death; now blackened ashes that meant life to him. His fears had vanished with the threads of smoke from the burning letter. His slate was wiped clean of the one great mistake of his life.

Suddenly Olgren's eyes began to blurr, his hands to grow moist with perspiration. He felt dizzy, light-headed. He drank a little black coffee in an attempt to brace himself. But to no avail. He was deadly sick, growing worse each moment. He was shaking violently as if from cold, though his entire body seemed to be a living furnace. He stretched out a hand to ring for a waiter but his strength failed him. His arm fell upon the table, and his head slipped down until it found a pillow in the hollow of his arm.

And thus Olgren laid there, his heavy breathing stirring up the ashes of the burnt letter. There was a fierce dryness in Olgren's throat, a choking that approached suffocation. Then he grew quiet. The little heap of ashes stirred no longer. Olgren was dead.

In the morning, the papers came out flaunting the news of the death of John Olgren, clubman and scion of the rich, whose dead body had been found in a box in a cheap up-town café. Followed a great mass of collected details of the case and the usual suppositions of the various authorities of the law.

One detail was out of the ordinary, was quite behind the veil. Upon the arrival of the police at the scene of the tragedy, there was found on the table in front of the dead man a little heap of ashes, the key to the mystery that surrounded Olgren's death.

Days later, an autopsy upon the dead

body, revealed that Olgren's death was due to poisoning, the evidence pointing to self-destruction, although, on the other hand, murder was highly probable.

For days following, the public devoured the disclosures of the investigations of the Olgren case, all of which were choice news and choice reading. Olgren's life was traced back to the days of his younger manhood, and further. His known friends and acquaintances were interrogated. Mrs. Durian, when called upon to go through the ordeal, was mistress of her lips and emotions during her stay in the county attorney's office. All of the different channels of the case were followed out in an effort to change the evidence to murder, to place the guilt at someone's door. But the evidence of the case upheld the verdict of the coroner's jury, and so John Olgren's passing to the other world was one of disgrace and dishonor.

After a few weeks (Olgren's death having declined, during that time, from printed importance to spasmodic gossip) Luke Durian returned home from an extended trip south, where, as he gave out to the papers, he had been investigating business conditions in that region of the country in relation to extending and laying a foundation for the marketing of the production of his various factories, all of which was swallowed like bait by the reporters and the public.

Upon reaching his home Durian was informed that his wife had suffered a complete break-down and had a doctor and a nurse in attendance. Durian was, indeed, very much worried over her condition, for he loved his wife over anything that walked the earth. His life was wrapped up in her's. Her death would mean his death, eventually.

That evening Durian sat down by his fireplace, all lights stilled except the flickering shadow-forming light of the fire in front of him. He wanted to take stock of himself. He wanted to find out how things stood with him, just what remained in life for him to live for, that is, if he were able to forget.

If Elsie had not been so careless as to leave that letter of Olgren's for him to find! She had spent six years of her life concealing the letter, and then in one moment of forgetfulness she had exposed her entire life to him. And her visit to Olgren's apartments—it had been the acme of indiscretion on her part, to put herself open to discovery of her clandestine love affair. He forgave her because he loved her. But Olgren—

Olgren was dead. Was there any use of forgiving a dead man? Durian emitted a stifled laugh. Olgren, dead? It didn't seem possible. He had poisoned the letter and the age-worn flower before having turned them over to his accomplice. He had left everything to fate to work out. If Olgren deserved death, fate, through means of the poisoned letter would bring it about. If not, well, Olgren would still live to enjoy life and women. And fate had been kind to Durian, had upheld the righting of his wrongs.

Olgren was dead and the letter destroyed. How the letter came to be burned was as much a mystery to Durian as it was to the police. But after taking all things into consideration, he had truly carried out his own portion of the affair faultlessly. No one thought to implicate him with the crime, unless the conscience of his accomplice, weakening under the strain of guilt, brought her to confess to the world. But Durian was sure of the woman, sure of her conscience being dead, sure that the cleverly worked out details of his crime would remain a secret between them. His trip south had worked wonderfully in helping him to elude the meshes of the law.

The flames in the fireplace pulsed up and down. Sitting there, Durian recalled Olgren's words spoken as if in jest:

"Love is a destroying fire. I have kept my fingers out of the fire."

THE OFFICIAL PHOTOGRAPHER

By HERBERT FORDER

Entered in the BLACK CAT *Short Story Contest*

"IN the hour of defeat the victory is won," said James Chippin to himself innumerable times. "What did Marshal Foch mean when he said that?"

Behind the insignificant five feet four of James went on the wreck and ruin which spelled the end of all things economic to Jimmy Chippin. Within the four walls of a forty-two story Seattle office building the second-hand men were bundling up the office furniture, while the superintendent of the building was waiting patiently to lock the doors upon the last vestiges of "The New Shop," a monthly business publication started on a shoestring, carried three months on nerve, and another three on the brilliant promise of its editorials, only to collapse like many another great idea for want of funds.

James Brackenridge Chippin, editor-in-chief, official photographer, illustrator, stenographer, business manager, advertising solicitor, and circulation department of the defunct monthly, thrust nimble little hands into the pockets of his pants and twiddled three dimes, two nickels, five pennies and a boat ticket.

It was the Fourth of July.

Below him Second Avenue was a mass of fluttering bunting in the golden sunshine. Decorators were putting on the final touches. Gay crowds were seeping in from Lake and Sound and the vast hinterland of Western Washington. But Jimmy saw none of these; before his keen gray eyes grew up the vision of friend wife, Alma Maude, a bride of twelve months and a little mother nursing her two weeks old babe.

"In the hour of defeat the victory is won."

He looked at the coins, thrust them back in his pocket and strode from the empty room, so obsessed with his problem that he did not hear a kindly, "Good-bye and good luck, Jimmy," from the superintendent.

As he passed the door of the Western Fotomatography Syndicate, he sensed a violent controversy taking place behind the half-open door.

"You go plumb to hell, sir. This outfit owes me three weeks'-wages. Here's the Fourth here and you expect me to shoot the show, which means three hours out in that sun, and have a good time on ten dollars. Not on your life, sir. I'm through with this bunch. I'll sue you for my wages. I've got a good thing in sight, and don't intend to fool around here with these wildcat schemes any longer."

"Listen, Hal."

But Halford Browne did not stop to listen further. He rushed out of the office, nearly fell over the listening Jimmy, flung something from his arm, and disappeared in the descending elevator.

Twenty minutes later, Mr. James Chippin, bleeding profusely from three nasty looking wounds in the side of his face and forehead, and feeling very groggy, dashed into the front of the Monitor building. Dropping on the black and white marble tiles, he drew a handkerchief and was immediately

the center of a crowd of gasping and pretty stenographers, trig cub reporters and comfortable office staff. First aid was rendered with prompt and exquisite care. Foremost among the crowd was Colonel B. M. Beaumont, the bluff and hearty owner of the Monitor, a giant who still preserved in his leonine personality something of the virile manhood and audacity which carried the pioneers across the Rockies to The Land of Promise.

"Hello, Jimmy Chippin," he cried. "What's doing? Been venting your baby wrath on Jack Dempsey, eh?"

"Not quite so bad as that, Colonel," replied Jimmy, weakly, as he squirmed under several inches of adhesive plaster being applied to his wounds by a very energetic first aid man. "Just a little automobile smash. Ran into a telegraph pole. Lost my camera, ditched my runabout—and everything."

"Why! Were you going to shoot the big show? I thought you were running the New Shop magazine. Trying to teach us graybeards how to run our business, like Henry Ford."

"Not that, sir; the New Shop is an old story now. Gone fluey. Bust. Sold up. Departed. Defunct. In other words, it went on the rocks at precisely nine-thirty this morning."

"So you took a job to shoot the big splash in Seattle for some of these motion picture sharks?"

"That's the idea, sir. Working for the Fotomatography outfit. Now I got no camera. No job. No car. No nothing."

His lugubrious tones fitted well with his general appearance, for he looked like a hundred twenty pound mannikin who had tried to stop a tank with his face.

"Cheer up, old fellow. You were the cheekiest cub that ever wrote a rotten story for the Monitor. Let's see if we can get you a camera."

During this interesting conversation they had traveled from the first floor to the palatial inner sanctum of the editor. James Chippin flopped into a seat of a deep russet leather lounge, which immediately rose up and engulfed him. The colonel reached for the phone connecting him with all departments.

"Photography, please, miss. . . . Hello! Is that you, Curtis? If you can spare five minutes come down, please. This is Beaumont speaking."

In three minutes, a huge, happy, fat man appeared, Charles Curtis, the Monitor's chief camera fiend.

"Curtis, my boy, I want you to look over the remains of our friend James Brackenridge Chippin, sometime editor-in-chief, president, proprietor and founder of the New Shop, thirty-two pages monthly, a very fervid disciple of Henry Ford, but, unlike Henry, quite unable to round up the dough in little flocks. This gentleman started out to shoot the Fourth of July this morning with a huge camera, a little car and his usual shipload of nerve. Not quite liking the alignment of our telegraph poles in Seattle, he demolishes one, makes a junk pile of car and camera and dislocates several of our good paving blocks with that bronze dial of his. He tells us he's still official photographer, but has no car, no camera, and will soon have no job, unless we lend him a new outfit. Do the best you can for him, Charlie. He's a poor benighted sinner, more nut than genius, but he gave the old Monitor many a ghastly trouncing in the vitriolic pages of the New Shop, which same was my monthly laughfest, so we do owe him a good turn. Fix him up and take him out on the firing line."

It was a battle-scarred, but jubilant Jimmy who left the Monitor building twenty minutes later, obscured by a seventy-pound Bell and Howell, with its tripod dwarfing and entangling his own little legs.

"Official Photographer. Automobile accident. New camera. Must have a swell hotel. Don't look right wandering round on the hot curb waiting for the show to start. 'In the hour of defeat the victory is won,'" said the little man to himself, like a high priest mumbling prayers interminably before some Buddhist shrine.

Walking into the foyer of the Washingtonian, he saluted the manager at the office grill.

"Look here, Murdock. I've just had a rotten automobile accident; lost my runabout, camera and everything. Colonel Beaumont kindly let me have a new outfit. I'm shooting the show for the Fotomatography outfit. But I'm feeling pretty sick. Anyhow, I'm going to feature your old house strong. In the meanwhile I must rest. Give me the best suite in the house for a couple of days or so till I recuperate."

Now John Murdock was a keen business man. He had advertised extensively in the New Shop and enjoyed its optimistic persiflage of the Elbert Hubbard brand while it lasted. Also, he knew James B. Chippin for a live wire, carrying a current of twenty thousand volts. And when that young man said he'd feature the Washingtonian in a big news film, Murdock knew that the little chap was as good as his word, or better. And while he knew little or nothing of the Fotomatography Syndicate, he thought he knew enough of Chippin to realize that he'd never work for anything but a top-notch concern. This young man was a scintillating example of the personal equation. Therefore, he beckoned Jimmy to draw closer.

"Listen now, Mr. Chippin, if you're bent on giving us a good show in this news film, the courtesy of the hotel is at your disposal. There is a nice three-room suite with bath on the fourth floor, facing Second Avenue, and I'll O. K. your meal ticket to the extent of thirty dollars. That should carry you nicely for a couple of days, eh?"

"You're on. I'll shoot a couple of hundred feet right now. Just start your taxis moving up to the front with a mountain of grips and trunks aboard. Then set your foyer, dining hall, and a couple of swell suites. I'll write in the leaders, 'Seattle's First Caravanserai, the Washingtonian Hotel,' 'The Foyer of the Palatial Washingtonian Hotel, Second Avenue,' and so on."

While little Jimmy was shooting away as per this agreement, a man of tremendous girth and stature stood straddle-legged watching the seance. He followed Jimmy's work from foyer to dining hall, from dining hall through three beautiful suites on the second floor, and when Jimmy placed his camera in the suite allotted to him, the big stranger pounded his knuckles on the door.

"Come in, Murdock," said Jimmy, and looking up from the camera, he met the newcomer. "Hello! I thought it was old Murdy. What can I do for you?"

"My name is Jacob Lowenstein, president of the Cosmos News Film Syndicate, New York. I've been watching your work. Frankly, I'm interested. Who are you shooting the show for, a Seattle firm?"

"You've said it, Mr. Lowenfeld."

"Lowenstein, please, Mr. Chippin. I'll be glad to give you my card."

"Sorry, old chap. Glad to meet you."

"Does your firm happen by any chance to be the Fotomatography Syndicate?"

"That's the identical mob, sir. How about it?"

At this admission, Mr. Jacob Lowenstein exploded, and for a moment little Jimmy thought the Fourth of July celebration was starting off in his rooms.

"Of all the golfired, puddin'-headed, cow-hearted, pig-tailed, yellow-skinned

aggregation of numbskulls, scoundrels and scallywags! Look here, Mr. Chippin, you'll pardon my exhibition of temper. You seem to be a man of the world. What is this bunch of shysters trying to do? Wherever I go on the Pacific Slope I have to contend with their childish, amateurish and chronic muddling."

As he thundered forth this denunciation he tramped the floor and gesticulated madly, his red neck swelled, and his large hands smote each other in fistic emphasis. "Any time we start to shoot a good news film, often a world-beater, here are these jackasses, right in ahead of us, sending out rotten stuff that is absolutely killing the Pacific for this kind of material, and smashing my clientele all to hell. They always manage to get ahead of us, being in with the grafters that be I suppose, and always send their beastly muck to my circuits, till a picture of main events out here isn't worth a cent a foot. What's their little game, anyhow?"

J. B. Chippen arose, walked over to a mirror in his bedroom, removed a piece of plaster from the wound in his forehead, and another from the wound in his cheek, then decided to leave the decoration on his chin. He walked back, lit a cigarette, settled himself comfortably on a Chesterfield lounge and surveyed the big man whimsically.

"I'm like a certain great poet who came to this country to lecture. Before I talk I would like to meet a little temptation.

The big man stopped abruptly in his stride and looked at the battered countenance of little Jimmy, then laughed a roar of Homeric merriment.

"Why you little sawnoff runt! You talk like Napoleon crossing the Alps and dictating terms to the Cossacks."

And while his history was all at sea, Jacob Lowenstein really felt the appreciation masked by his sarcasm.

"And what did he say," queried Jimmy. "I'm keen on these Frenchmen myself."

"You can search me, boy. But I know this, you're carrying the wrong brand. Get me?"

"I realize it, sir, and then some. In the meanwhile carry on with the propaganda."

Jacob Lowenstein carried over his chair, offered Jimmy a fragrant Monopole, lit both cigars from his match, and went on in comparative calm.

"I know this much about your people. They've spent a lot of money and got nowhere. They've financed this hair-brained Englishman, Whitbread, in his scheme to cover the country with 'News Film Centers,' stuff taken by local operators, each owning a block of shares in the parent company, each selling news stuff at so much per foot to this central office, and each participating in the dividends, if any. Now this butts right into a pet scheme of my own. I've tried to talk to them, but they're impossible. As soon as they see my card they begin to think in billions. That's why I'm here incog. What I want is this, a clever and reliable proxy to buy them out, and get this mad Englishman with his camera and amazing ideas on educational films, automobile touring guides and all this new stuff he's been trying to put over lately into the Cosmos Film Syndicate for a salary that'll keep him in coffee and doughnuts, anyway. I've picked on you for that proxy. Can you put it over? Yes or no, that's all I want."

"And where do I come in?"

"This is where you come in, Mr. Chippin. I like your style. There's a world of nerve about the cut of your battered jib that looks good to me. What you lack in poundage you make up in pure gray matter. Buy them out for what they've put in to date, six thousand, and I'll make you a present

of a cool thousand, and give you a job right in their office as my manager for the Northwest Pacific."

"That listens good, Mr. Lowenstein. This is the Fourth of July, my busy day. Be ready to pay into my bank seven thousand to-morrow noon, when I shall be ready to hand you the articles of sale. In the meanwhile do me the honor of taking lunch."

When Jimmy Chippin and Jacob Lowenstein walked into the dining room arm in arm, like lion and jackel, trotting together, Manager Murdock gasped again.

"Well I'll be hanged for a sea-cow! Hand it to little Jimmy for capturing the big game!"

During the afternoon Jimmy was again enabled to do the big fellow a favor. He had just commenced to grind, when Lowenstein dashed across behind him.

"Say, Jimmy, my camera man has had some trouble with the police; they had him shunted away up on Fourth behind a crowd of howling fanatics. I'd hate to miss this naval and military stuff. Can you accommodate him?"

"Trot him right over and we'll exchange, Jakey. Oodles of time."

And using his inside knowledge of the local police force, and his very prominent "Official Photographer" armlet and amulet, he secured the premier point of vantage where the great parade turned at Second and Pike, fairly in the center of the Avenue on the police officer's little island of traffic control, where he caught every face gleaming for a moment into the lens of his B. & H.

In a few minutes, Lowenstein had his big car right up behind Jimmy, and the exchange was made before the big features of the procession arrived.

"Gee! kid!" he gasped, mopping his brow with his silk handkerchief, "but you're sure making a killing with me!"

"Yeh," said Jimmy, grinning, "and I'll make a massacre of the innocents for you to-morrow at twelve o'clock."

Jimmy Chippin took to the back blocks, running with his load of apparatus and arrived at Fourth, just in time to catch a baby riot caused by some mounted police backing into the crowd. Before you could blink he had set up and was grinding away. One of the prancing horses nearly smashed his camera, but he held his ground and snatched a hundred feet of exciting, red-blood stuff.

As he kept cranking away he murmured to himself, "In the hour of defeat the victory is won."

That evening, with the festival at its height and a bombardment rattling the roofs of the Queen City, Mrs. Alma Maude Chippin met her battle-scarred little hero and his backer at the Washingtonian. They had a wonderful little supper together, then went out to see the fireworks. Alma Maude was raving in suppressed curiosity, but wise little woman that she was, she knew how to keep her mouth smiling, but reticent.

She took up her quarters at the Washingtonian, and Jimmy informed Manager Murdock, kindly but firmly, that the courtesy idea was all off, that the Washingtonian would still get its big place in his film, but that he would require the suite for himself, his wife and their nursemaid, for an indefinite period; all of which tickled Manager Murdock right on his financial funnybone.

At eight-thirty o'clock A. M. to the minute on the fifth of July, little Jimmy assaulted the office of the Fotomatography Syndicate; assaulted is the only word to describe his entrance. He still wore his "Official Photographer" armlet, with its magic suggestion of power and personality. He ran right into a heated argument. Miss Quarry had put up a thousand of her savings to help out their colossal ineptitude. Mr. Gustave Prue had lost two thousand, most of which had been spent on himself when

dining and wining prospective investors from the tall timbers of Washington. And Mr. Anthony Havens, the only level-headed human being among them, had squandered another three thousand trying to put over the brilliant conceptions of Mr. Algernon Whitbread, the English camera shark, who had shot everything on three continents, from flying royalty in Roumania to tigers in the Punjab, and never made a cent above his daily needs, and who now sat during this ardent controversy in the back office eating chocolate nut-bars and humming the haunting refrain of the Barcarole.

Jimmy opened like a howitzer barrage. "Look here, you guys! When're you going to come down off that airy-fairy Lillian stuff and shoot a few feet of film that'll get you a dollar per twelve inch? While you were trying to swindle your camera man out of a few days' pay, I hopped to the firing line with my little gun and brought down a bull moose. And that same king of the moose has given me *carte blanche* to buy this whole caboodle. But, mark you! No shinanigan! He'll buy for just what you people have put in—"

"Hold a minute! Who is this bull moose? What's his name? Is he to be found in Dunn's or Bradstreet's, or is he one of Seattle's own Four Hundred?" inquired Mr. Prue.

"Nope! I guess he's from Puyallup, and his real name is Hiram Scissorbill. He's one of those that's born every minute, has a forty-second cousin in the movies, and wants to take a flyer as a motion-picture magnate in sunny old Seattle. He told me he sold the farm and a brindle cheese factory, the same consisting of three dozen assorted Jersey-Holsteins, and the limit of his roll is six thousand dollars."

"Well! You're one wise guy, Jimmy. On the Fourth you close down the New Shop—and all you have left is a dime and a toothpick. On the fifth you catch a sucker and want to come into the motion-picture game to the extent of six thousand dollars. It sounds good, and, while we're not exactly from Missouri, we'd like to be shown."

"I can get you six thousand iron men at a moment's notice," replied Jimmy. "What do you say? My time's precious. Let it be 'yea, brother' or 'nay, brother.' If it's nay, then James B. Chippin opens his own little show next door, right in my old office, with a battery of camera and photo fiends that'll make your Englishman hop to the briny beaches of golden California and take to the dime-a-time-taken-and-finished-on-the-spot-sweetheart-and-yourself-photo game."

"Oh, Jimmy!" cried Miss Quarry, "let me see a thousand dollars and I'll hug you for joy. I'm so sick of this everlasting bunch of tin-horn stock gamblers."

"You shut up, Miss Quarry," ordered Prue, thumping the table. "You're paid a good salary here as stenographer. Stick to your job. Your investment is exactly the same as anyone else's who may invest. Your say so is practically *nil*—"

"Yes," she bawled tearfully, "like my thousand."

"When we need your advice we'll 'phone for it. In the meantime, rave on if that will ease the pain in your pocketbook," said Mr. Prue, and turning savagely upon Jimmy, "do you mean to tell me that you have the audacity to offer us a paltry six thousand dollars for twelve months' hard work and over that amount spent in hard cash? Where do our back wages come in? And what do you offer for the syndicate as a going concern?"

"In the first place," replied Jimmy, "the only place you're going is on the rocks, where the New Shop is now reclining with the rest of the dead ones. Why, you couldn't shoot the show yesterday because you refused to pay Halford Browne three weeks' wages due. When he sues you for them you'll have to shut your doors, and I'm well aware

of the fact that there will be a few other little suits filed at the same time. Then, again, I'm not paying you for twelve months' work, for the kind of work you've done here could be better done at Steilacoom by the poor bugs. I'm paying you to remove a junk pile which is hindering the work of better men. I'll give you till twelve o'clock to draw up your articles of sale which will hand over to me everything but your love letters and Miss Quarry's hairpins. Use my attorneys, Helmore & Green, in this building, to draw up your agreement of sale; I'll pay for that. If you're not ready by twelve o'clock I cancel my offer. Good-bye."

He had reached the door when Havens grabbed him on one side, and Miss Quarry seized his arm on the other.

"Look here, Jimmy. Don't pay any attention to Prue. We'll make him see reason and talk sense. Is this six thousand spot cash at twelve o'clock?"

"That's what I said. Spot cash, less my commission, of course,"

"What do you want?" asked Havens, sadly.

"Twenty-five per cent," replied Jimmy, and began to walk away, with his hands in his trousers pocket, whistling a merry refrain.

"You go to hell, you little shrimp! I'd sooner go to Walla Walla than see you steal fifteen hundred bones out of six thousand for this syndicate. If you said sixty thousand, there'd be some sense in it," shouted Mr. Prue, through the open door of the office.

"Quite so," replied Jimmy, "and in that case, gentlemen, my commission would be exactly ninety per cent. Just figure in out."

He turned out of the door in time to see the giant frame of Algernon Whitbread enter the descending elevator. He found him casually supporting the center of the swing doors in the Second Avenue entrance; with one stodgy but nimble paw he peeled the silver paper from another bar of chocolate, while the other hand deftly connected match and cigarette.

"Hello, English!" hailed Jimmy, slapping him on the back, and knocking his lighted match into his bar of chocolate. "Say, old fellow, I've been laughing my fool head off at that story you told in the cigar stand the other day."

"Ah! Which one was that, Chippin? It's deucedly hard to get you solemn Yankees to smile at that English atmosphere," answered the great camera fiend, tickled all over like a kid at a picnic.

"Why, that one about the ghost of the old king somewhere in the back blocks of New Zealand."

"Ah! My word! But that was a bally corking yarn, old top, eh, what!"

"I'll say so. Never laughed so much in all my life," went on Jimmy, looking at his watch carefully. "I haven't had time to get breakfast yet. I wonder if you'd mind eating with me at the Washingtonian?"

"I don't mind taking a cup of coffee with you, old chap, and a club sandwich, and anything you may say will be deserving of my sincere consideration, I'm sure."

In the office of the Fotomatography Syndicate, the argument continued in all the fury of pro and con. Mr. Prue raved. Mr. Havens pulled at his close-cut beard. He alone seemed to realize that what Jimmy had said was true. "Bankruptcy, nothing and disgrace, or four thousand five hundred dollars." Only Miss Quarry smiled, quietly, over her machine, for she at least could see her thousand dollars looming nearer in the offing of their financial night.

Finally, Mr. Havens rang up the Washingtonian and tried to connect with Mr. Chippin, only to find that he had just stepped out.

During the next hour Mr. Prue and Mr. Havens were busy answering 'phone calls from lawyers, each and every one

threatening suit on the morrow for the past due bills of their particular clients. And while Mr. Havens answered them with a disarming and charitable tolerance, Mr. Prue stamped and raved, swearing in seven different languages that this was some more of that little shrimp's dirty work.

When the lawyers got through with them they managed to connect with Jimmy.

"I'll give you fifteen per cent., Jimmy. That's the very best we can do."

"Nothing doing, Havens. I'm really presenting you with forty-five hundred dollars which I could just as easily take and put into a show of my own. But before I commence I want you people out of the business, lock, stock and barrel, so that I can make a clean sweep. When you are ready to walk out with your private papers, I'll talk. If you're not ready by twelve o'clock I shall go out to get quotations for new office furniture, 'phone the building to hold my old suite for me, and tell my backer that we shall just naturally have to freeze you out. Good-bye."

After a savage conflict, Miss Quarry and Mr. Havens overpowered the insensible Mr. Prue, and it was Miss Quarry who called Jimmy up and asked him to come down to the office. By ten minutes to twelve, James B. Chippin was in possession of the business and two thousand five hundred dollars.

Just as the others were leaving with their grips, Halford Browne, followed by a uniformed messenger, entered the wide-open door.

"Listen, boys," commenced Browne excitedly, "who do you think is in town?" Before he could get in another word, Mr. Havens read aloud to the company the following missive:

"Dear Prue and Havens:

"I have been offered a rattling good berth by Jacob Lowenstein, who is opening the biggest thing of its kind on the coast here. Shall really have to accept, you know. You did the best you could. I feel like the admiral deserting his ship before it goes down; but, really, I can't make a square meal on a pile of stocks, and couldn't collect pin money as a salesman. Thanks for all the good times we have had together, and don't think too harshly of me; it might soil the epicurean repast which I am lolling over at this moment at the Washingtonian with our mutual friend, James Brackenridge Chippin.

"Yours, but not exclusively,
"Alloysius Algernon Whitbread."

"Listen, boys," broke in Halford Browne again impatiently.

"Listen, yourself, you pin-headed piker! If you'd done that yesterday when I asked you to listen a moment, we'd have made them sign to the tune of sixty thousand dollars instead of a lousy six minus fifteen hundred dollars commission to that shrimp of a Chippin."

"So it's Lowenstein that's behind this thing? Hell!"

At two o'clock, Jacob Lowenstein met the Englishman in the office with Jimmy and Alma Maude.

"Thank goodness," said Jakey, heaving a big sigh as he bit off the end of another Monopole. "Now we can go to work and put over the biggest thing ever done in news films. Jimmy, your salary is four hundred and fifty a month. You are manager of the Northwest, covering Seattle, Vancouver, Victoria, Calgary, Edmonton, Prince Rupert, Portland, Tacoma, Everett and Spokane. Mr. Whitbread here is our camera man at seventy-five per week and expenses—but he ain't goin' to charge on his expense sheets for chocolates and cigarettes, not if I know it—and this is only a beginning, gentlemen."

"That reminds me," said Jimmy, "I want to make you a present of the film I shot yesterday. It's one of the best I ever—"

"Present, nothing!" roared Jakey. "I bought this whole shooting match and gave you a cool thousand to do it for me. Now you want to make me a present of my own film, which you took while working for this outfit. I like that. You have face enough to beat the devil with loaded dice."

"You'll have to think again, Jakey. I wasn't working for them. I was working for myself. I elected myself official photographer when their camera man, Halford Browne, threw his badge away. Then I faked an automobile accident, struck myself three times in the face with a nice, clean brick round the back blocks where nobody could see me, and on the strength of my sad countenance kidded the old Colonel into lending me an outfit. I guess you know the rest, Jakey."

The big fellow scratched the pomaded smoothness of his rounded skull in profound amazement, while his smouldering Monopole described a slow semi-circle as it twisted across his mobile lips from side to side of his drooping, humorous mouth.

"Look here, my boy! I just made the big mistake of my life. I can't have a man like you hanging around here. Get out of here, I say. Seattle is no place for nerve like yours. You leave for New York to-morrow and your salary is eight hundred a month. Mr. Leonard Jones in the New York house will come here."

And as they shook solemnly, the bull moose of news films heard the little fellow mutter to himself, "In the hour of defeat the victory is won."

If you can't be original, copy some guy who is.—*Tad.*

Remember the good old days when the trainmen used to throw coal at folks hooking rides on freight trains?—*Bridgeport Telegram.*

The old metaphors are losing their acuteness. "Dollars to doughnuts" now means about even money.—*F. P. A.*

TRIBULATION AND CALAMITY

By AUGUSTIN W. BREEDEN

ONEST Henry Honeycutt leaned far back in his swivel chair, crossed his feet in a litter of papers and checker men, and gazed meditatively at a dust covered map of Missouri on the wall of his little real estate office.

"Was you ever down in them hills next to the Arkansas line?" he asked me. I confessed that I had never been down there, and he went on:

"I done the only stroke of big business I ever done in my life down in there. Ever hear of old Harmon Bradley?"

I believed I had, just to lead him on.

"Well, it was following his sudden demise that the thing took place. That was eleven years ago. One wintry March day I was going home to dinner from the grocery store where I had spent the morning playing checkers, and as I was passing in front of this office the wind commenced to blow so strong that I backed in the doorway here to keep from being blowed into the street, which was about a foot and a half deep in mud. My father and my Uncle Bill run this shop in those days, but neither of 'em was ever here much, my old man being mostly at his store and Uncle Bill down about the wagon yard swapping lies and horses. Well, as I was stepping back onto the plank walk up rushed a wild-eyed, battered and bewhiskered individual, and says he: 'Do you run this real estate office?'

"I saw in a minute that here was a chance to relieve the ongwee, which is the curse of such burgs as this, and says I, 'I do.'

"'I have a proposition,' says he.

"'I was just starting home to dinner,' I batted back. 'If you'll come back after dinner one of my clerks will talk to you. By the way, Honeycutt is my name. What's yours?'

"'Botts is mine,' he admits. 'But listen, Mr. Honeycutt, this business is urgent; and besides it is a confidential matter. I don't want to talk to no clerks; I want to talk to you.'

"'All right,' I agreed, 'if you want to talk to me as I walk along to dinner, come along.'

"We started down the street yonder toward my old man's rendevoo and Botts begins to make his spiel. At first I thought he was just plain crazy; but as he talked on I decided he was a second rate con artist with a big phony proposition up his sleeve. He said he'd been running some sort of business in a little office on the twenty-first floor of a Chicago skyscraper. As near as I could make out what his business was from his testimonials, he was secretary for some sort of crazy society for the prevention of something or other. And he said that three mornings before as he was climbing the nineteenth flight of stairs, because the elevator didn't run as high as his office except when it had two-bit rubberneck passengers for the roof, he paused to blow in front of a certain office door and heard voices inside.

"The voices emanated from two grand swamis of high finance. One was H. H. Talbot, the best succession lawyer west of New York, and the other was old Hiram Gibbs of this little burg of Drayton, Missouri, a man whose name often figured in the hotel arrivals of New York

and Chicago on account of a million and a half. Old Gibbs is a trifle deaf and they were both talking loud. Well, the upshot of what they said, as Botts reported it to me, was that a certain old geezer many times a millionaire was dead there in the city. Harmon Bradley his name was, and he had three relatives down there in the Ozark hills—one Milt, one Bob, and one Buck Bradley. Botts understood that these three tater-grabblers was to receive about a half million each. He said he also secured their post office address, but he declined to put me onto that.

"By the time that specimen had reached this point in his narrative I was beginning to sit up and rub my peepers, but I was careful not to let him notice it. His mentioning our local millionaire was all the proof I wanted that the thing was gilt-edge. I knew old Gibbs was in Chicago on some sort of business at that time. Botts's proposition was for me to go in with him and put up some good farms and the like to swap to those flint-crushers for a half interest in their fortune before they had time to find out how big the fortune really was.

" 'Come home and take dinner with me,' I said. 'Meantime I'll verify your story before wasting any more time on it. Also I guess you wouldn't object to a clean shirt and collar, a hot tub and a shave. Those cattle trains out of Chicago are pretty cold riding now, aren't they?'

"While I was speaking I ushered him into the house and shoved him gently into the bathroom. I could see plain enough that he was impressed with his surroundings. My old man's house is one that is featured on the post cards of this town. But Dad happened to be out of town that day and I decided I would play the man of the house. I knew Mother was too good a sport to give me away; and I managed to whisper to her that my party was about to employ me in a big succession matter, but that we could not talk business in her presence and that if I put on some airs before him she must not show surprise.

"While he was dressing for dinner I got a back number of the Kansas City Star and learned from it that one Harmon Bradley, a millionaire, had recently died in Chicago. Then during dinner, which was manna in the desert, and a godsend, and the philanthropic ravens to my famished promoter, I asked Mother casually: 'Mother, do you know any Bradleys down in the hills?'

"She studied a little, then she said: 'Yes, there's a family of Bradleys living down about Tribulation Cross Roads. There's a Milton Bradley runs a store down there.' Mother had taught school all about in those parts before she fell for the princely charms of pater.

" 'Is this Tribulation Cross Roads much of a town?' asked Botts.

" 'No, it isn't,' I answered. 'It's a place where hill billies foregather of Saturdays to pitch horseshoes and swap lies. The only thing you can buy there is Battle Axe tobacco and Arm and Hammer soda. And right across the road from the store is a blacksmith shop with a mud hole out just in front of it and a last year's circus poster sticking to the side. I've never seen the place. Have I described it, Mother?'

" 'Yes, that's the way it looked the last time I saw it,' she said.

"I could see from Botts's face that we had located the Bradley family tree right enough. 'Mr. Botts,' I said after dinner, 'you stay right here and I'll run down to the office and get all the necessary papers and also have a team sent round from the stable.'

"I hurried down to my father's store, picked up a few official looking papers out of the waste basket, and then trotted over to my uncle's livery stable. My colored friend, Uncle Neal, was there in charge. He had been one of our family servants when I was a lad growing up and would do anything on earth for me.

"'Uncle Neal,' I said, 'get me out two horses, one that will saddle and one that won't saddle under any circumstances whatever and won't allow a man on its back; hitch 'em to a good strong buggy for me and slip me a saddle and blanket and a good buggy wrench under the seat.'

"'Now lookee heah, Mistah Henry,' says old Uncle Neal, 'yo' bettah not be up to any ob' yo' tricks, kase when de gov'nah gits home he's gwine to raise old Sam wid yo'.'

"'Never you worry, Uncle Neal,' says I. 'The governor ain't going to worry about this deal. I'm playing the good Samaritan this time; I'm guarding three little lambs to keep them from being eaten by a hairy old wolf right out of the jungles of Chicago.'

"I started to drive the team around to the house myself, but met Botts on the public square. The idiot was inquiring the way to Tribulation Cross Roads as I pulled up and no telling how much of his business he had given away.

"'Never mind about Tribulation, Uncle Johnny,' I said in order to put the crowd on the wrong trail, 'we won't want to go there till about the first of May when the trout begin to strike. Jump in now, for we'll have to drive to beat the band if we get to Unionville, Kansas, by to-morrow noon.'

"And so, because of that fool's four-flushing, I had to drive out of town north on the Unionville road instead of due south toward Tribulation. By five o'clock that windy afternoon we had made a wide circuit and were perhaps fifteen miles from Drayton. Say, but those roads were fierce. They had froze and thawed, froze and thawed till there wasn't any bottom to 'em. About half past five we stopped near a farm house on a hill, and I sent Botts up to ask if we could get lodging for the night with hot supper served in our rooms and private baths for two. He saw nothing queer about my request and trotted cheerfully off; and while he was gone to the house I unscrewed the tap from the left hind buggy wheel and dropped it into my overcoat pocket. Botts came back in about five minutes just snorting and said that the man of the house had insulted him.

"'Very well,' says I, 'there's plenty of other houses along here, and I suspect we'd better keep driving anyway as long as we can see.'

"We drove on for about half a mile and then the wheel came off. Botts was exasperated. All the way out from Drayton he had talked like a phonograph about the way we were going to swindle those poor Bradleys, and all the way out he had kept murmuring 'Tribulation,' sort of tasting the word, I thought, and he was completely torn up over this unforseen accident. We walked back over the road as far as the house where we had stopped, and then when it was too dark to have found the tap even if it had not been in my pocket, we gave up the search and returned to the buggy.

"I saddled the mean horse and told Botts to mount him, saying that I would ride the other one bareback. Botts mounted all right—he climbed up on a plank fence and crawled on like a fat drummer crawling into an upper berth. Then he suddenly began to pick himself up out of the mud.

"'Try again,' I encouraged. 'You touched him in the flank with your left hind foot; that's what caused him to pitch. Be more careful next time.'

"Say, that gazabo was game. If he crawled up on that steed's back once he crawled up a half dozen times; and every time, the next thing he did was to gather himself up out of the mud. Finally I took pity on him and told him to wait there in the road while I put the saddle on the other horse and went on to the next house to see if I could hire another buggy. And there in the dusk I left him and rode on toward Tribulation Cross Roads.

"I rode all night, rode hard and

reached Tribulation, chilled to the bone, about an hour after sunrise next morning. Sure enough there was a Milt Bradley there running a store, and his daughter Nancy, an apple-cheeked, starry-eyed, cherry-lipped girl, was running the post office. That girl sort of took my eye from the start. I introduced myself to the old man and then started in by making him remember my mother. When we had got on pretty good terms I asked him if he would pay me a reasonable commission if I proved to him that he was going to fall heir to a large sum of money and protected him against sharks in the matter. He said he would, and I started in from the first and told him honestly all I knew about the matter.

"'Look here, youngster,' he said as soon as I got through, 'you git me a hundred thousand dollars of this money an' I'll give you fifty thousand cold cash.'

"'All right,' says I, 'write that up in the form of a contract.'

"We had just got the contract signed, with Miss Applecheeks for a witness, when things began to happen. First came a man on a mule, my old friend Homer Stotts, a noted horse swapper and liar, but worth a little money in farm land. He rode up casually.

"'Don't make no trade with nobody without my advice,' I whispered, 'and let the other feller do all the talkin'.'

"'You two git in the ware room thar an' keep yore ears to the cracks in the do',' he commanded; and I found myself in a low shed room full o' plow points and salt pork, in close proximity with the healthiest, prettiest, rosiest country Jane I ever was near to.

"Say, but that Homer Stotts was an artist. He told an average of one lie to the sentence and he never once got his wires crossed. According to the way he misrepresented it, the Bradleys of Missouri weren't even mentioned in the dead man's will and the case would have to be worked up from the stump. His proposition was to work it on halves. But Bradley followed my advice and set fast, and when Stotts urged him to give him an answer, he told him he'd have to have an hour or two to think about it.

"While those two was talking a surrey drove up to the store. It was loaded with the crookedest law firm in Drayton here —Mayfield, Murray and Sharp. How had the news got out? Evidently my friend Botts had leaked like a street sprinkler from the minute he arrived in Drayton. Those fellows had hired a team to take 'em from Drayton to the railroad, took a train to Southwest City, and then drove out to Tribulation. They helloed and inquired the way to the county seat. Bradley told them the way, and then they started a squabble among themselves. Judge Mayfield and Tom Sharp pretended that they had to go on to the county seat to attend court, and Jack Murray pretended just as hard that he had to go back to Southwest City. And meanwhile, oh sweet thought, Applecheeks and I were doddling our heads together over one crack in the sliding door of the ware room. Finally those three parted company and Murray dropped into the store to ask if he could hire a team to take him back to the railroad. I couldn't see his face for Cherry-lip's fragrant auburn hair, but I know it looked like Black Friday when he ran onto old Homer Stotts in there. But he was game for the fight.

"'Bradley, Bradley,' he kept saying to himself when he had learned the storekeeper's name. 'Bradley, Bradlee? Where have I heard that name recently? Oh, yes, I remember now; a fellow of that name died in Chicago last week and left about a hundred thousand dollars. Do you suppose he was any kin of yours? They say he had oodles of relatives.'

"'Well naow, he mought 'a' been,' says Miss Pearly-teeth's father. 'Most o' the Bradleys ez I ever heared of was kin.'

"'Listen here, Mr. Bradley,' says Murray, 'suppose I should tell you that old Harmon Bradley's death entitled you to

a neat little sum, say, twenty thousand dollars, and I was to protect you from sharpers so you could get it? Would you give me half of what you got?'

"'Suppose,' answered the wise hill billie, 'suppose you say: "Mr. Bradley, that head o' cheese thar's your'n; don't let no sharpers toll it off wi' them." D'ye reckon I'd give you half the cheese for the information and advice?' At this Miss Cherrylips has to stuff her little handkerchief in her mouth to keep from giggling out. 'Er suppose you say: "Uncle Milt, that's a fine lookin' darter you got; don't let no low-down ornery cuss come along an' marry 'er." D'ye reckon I'd tell 'er to run and jump the broom for you jest for telling me what I already knowed?'

"At this Miss Starry-eyes looks at me sort o' shocked and then looks down and blushes the color of a Kansas sunset. And presently them two crooks in there has acknowledged to knowin' one another and started in biddin' agin each other for a half share in that fortune.

"'I'll give you a hundred and sixty acres o' land a mile from the town of Drayton for a half interest in your share!' shouts Stotts.

"'I'll give you five good business lots in Drayton and a twenty room brick hotel!' bids Murray.

"'An' two residence lots in Drayton,' says Stotts.

"'An' a good dairy farm near Marionville,' antes Murray.

"'I'll add two good mule teams, a wagon, a surrey, an' a cow an' calf!' shouts Stotts.

"'Hadn't you better throw in a churn and dasher fer good measure?' drawls Milt Bradley.

"'An' a churn an' dasher,' adds Homer Stotts, not seeing the irony of the joke.

"'I'll add twenty thousand one dollar shares of Jack City mining stock!' shouts Jack Murray. 'You understand, Mr. Bradley, I'm trading for the firm of Mayfield, Murray and Sharp.'

"'Wait a minute,' drawls Milt Bradley. 'Let's see if I onderstand jest what you fellers are tradin' for.'

"'For a quitclaim right in half of your interest in the Harmon Bradley estate,' says Murray, and Homer adds, 'That's right.'

Just then the trade was broken into temporarily by the mad galloping of a horse and the shouts of his rider.

"'Whoa, you long-haired, raw-boned, high-headed son of Beelzebub!' shouted a voice that I thought I recognized. 'Whoa! If I pull off this deal I'll wrap you in five dollar bills and burn you alive!'

"Cherrylips and I tiptoed to the sliding door at the front, and there, coming madly down the road bareback on that pitchin' bronk of Uncle Bill's, was my old friend Botts. His hat was gone, his collar and cuffs were hanging by a button apiece, and he was so literally covered with mud from head to foot that you might have took 'im for the fust man, the one God Almighty made out o' dirt. He had evidently rode that mean hoss from the place I left 'im in the road, and it's a safe bet he'd had to pick himself up on an average of once or twice to the mile. As he come in front of the store he commenced hauling in the left bridle rein as you haul in a towline an' the old hoss turned sidewise and come to such a sudden halt that he rolled off into the biggest mud hole in Tribulation. 'That's right, you old he-devil,' he grunted, 'buck me off again for good measure!'

"Miss Applecheeks had her handkerchief stuffed in her mouth again.

"'That's him, isn't it?' she tittered.

"'That's him,' I asseverated.

"He scrambled up the steps and into the store and began to spiel: 'This Mr. Milton Bradley? Botts is my name. I'm from Chicago and I've come to announce to you that you've got a good-sized fortune coming to you from the Harmon Bradley estate. Now if I protect you from sharpers and help you get it, will you give me half?'

"'Look here, Mister,' says Milt, and spit a long stream of hillside navy, 'you're about the fourteenth man that's come here this morning and offered to protect me from sharpers on the halves. Ef you want half my fortune you'll have to bid for it the same as these two.'

"'I'll give you—I'll give you,' shouts Botts; but he can't think what he'll give, because I'm not there to sidekick for him with my farm and things. 'I'll give you a check for seventy-five thousand, good the day the estate is settled and you get your share.'

"'Don't listen to old whiskers,' warns Homer Stotts. 'You heard my offer.'

"'And you heard mine!' shouts Murray. 'I'm backed by the firm of Mayfield, Murray and Sharp.'

"'And a good seven passenger touring car that can be put into shape with very little repairing,' antes the mud god.

"'I'll trade with you, and you,' drawls Milt, pointing first at Murray and then at Stotts. 'I'll call my wife for a witness and we can jest make a verbal trade.'

"At that there is a tremendous pounding on the front door, but Botts has pulled the latchstring inside, maybe thinking I was yet to come. I could see Mayfield and Sharp trying their best to get in, and hear 'em calling, 'Murray, hey Murray.' But that Chicago con artist is making so much noise that Murray in the excitement don't hear 'em. When I see that Miss Applecheek's father is about to trade off his birthright for a pot o' message, as you might say, I starts to butt in, but Applecheeks holds me back, and so the trade is made.

"And then Applecheeks catches me by both arms and begins to steer me toward the back door of the ware room, and I make a solemn resolution that if old Bradley heirs a big fortune or if he don't I'm going to have a throw for that girl. 'Come, hurry, Mr.—Mr. Honeycutt,' she whispers. 'Run to the house and bring me a kettle o' hot water.'

"I run like the wind, although I hadn't the least idea what she wanted with the hot water; I remember now I had a vague sort of notion that she was going to kill hogs. When I got back I found the girl in a little shed that served for a garage. She grabbed the kettle from my hand and began playing a stream of hot water on the vital organs of a tin lizard. 'Crank,' she panted, 'crank while I pour.'

"Directly the thing came to life. 'Jump in,' she ordered and I jumped. I'd have jumped just as quick at her word if I'd been standing on the rim of a live volcano. We sped out around back of the store to get into the big road, and just then we heard the awfullest row inside the store that ever broke loose since the original bedlam. Mayfield and Sharp had got in at last and they were evidently bawling somebody out, and three other men were yelling like fury. What came through to me sounded something like: 'Fool! Fool—' 'We've traded.' 'Got no—' 'Where's Buck Bradley?' 'Calamity—Calamity, not Tribulation—' 'You're a liar. Show me; I'm from Missouri!'

"Miss Applecheeks was laughing now at the top of her voice, a sweet trilling laughter; and just as we swung into the big road in front of the store, going at top speed, old Botts made a dash at us, shouting, 'Calamity—Calamity!' He just touched a back fender, spun round once or twice, and rolled into his favorite mud hole. Just then we heard the honk, honk of another car, and I slewed round in my place and saw a big roadster coming over the rise.

"'We'll have to stay ahead of them and lead 'em into the wrong road,' chirped Auburn-hair and opened her feed wide open.

"'Road to where?' I made inquiry.

"'Road to Calamity,' she made answer. 'Please don't talk to the man at the throttle.'

"'It'll be a calamity right here in this road if you don't choke her off a little,' I shook out. But she only smiled at me and bent low over the wheel.

"Crossing the Coon River bottoms the big roadster gained on us and finally passed us, but the ferryman on Coon waited for us and put the two cars over together. Old Hiram Gibbs and a gilt-edged looking city man and a Southwest City chauffeur were in the car. None of us got out of the cars while crossing. I leaned over and whispered to Cherrylips, while the others eyed us suspiciously, 'Honest to goodness, where are we headed for?'

"'Calamity.'

"We've barely escaped it a dozen times in the last half hour,' I said.

"'We'll beat 'em to it yet,' she laughed, as she threw in her clutch and bounded off the boat a bare ten feet behind the roadster. We had some weed chain trouble and for the next three or four miles saw very little of the other crowd, and then on a hill that was so straight it leaned back a little, we came up to them, with a dead engine and the big car set straight across the road. There wasn't a chance for us to pass.

"'What's the matter?' called Pearly-teeth sweetly.

"'Gas too low in the tank, Miss; won't feed up into the engine,' complained the chauffeur, and then: 'Say, if you'll lend me enough gas to get me up the hill I'll pay you back and some to spare when we're on the level.'

"'Ever hear the story of the fox and the billy goat that fell in the pit together?' asked Cherrylips tauntingly.

"'No, how's it go?'

"'Well, the one that got out first forgot to go back and help the other one out,' she flung at him, and with that she eased her little car back down the grade and turned off into a sort of cow trail and we sped away. Twice in the next hour we had to get out and pull cedar tops and grape vines out of the running gear, and twice she had to put 'er on high and jump gullies because we hadn't time to stop and fill 'em with logs and brush. And after a time we came to a hill that was a hill. Applecheeks poked the nose of the lizard a little way up, and the fire under the hood flickered and went out. 'Same trouble as theirs,' she chirped, 'gas so low it won't feed up to the engine.'

"'What do we do in a case like this?' I asked Sugarlips.

"'Use our heads like they didn't,' she replied sweetly, and she let the car roll back to the level, turned it around and backed it up the hill a quarter of a mile high. Then there was another level and then we backed up another long hill. Then there was another level and then more backing to do, up and up and then some. When we came out at the top, where nothing could grow but juniper and cactus, we could see for twenty miles across Coon River bottoms. It was a sightly place and the wind blew as if it was the turning of the world dragging against the outer space.

"In a little cove two hundred yards below us was a one-pen cabin and a rail-fenced deadening that was about the shape of a map of Texas, and sitting on the rail fence in front of the cabin was Old Father Time, or so I judged him to be from his general appearance.

"'Hello, Uncle Milt!' called Starry-eyes as we climbed down to the cabin. 'Reckon Uncle Bob and Uncle Buck's at home?'

"'Arkinsaw, Nance,' drawled Father Time as he unfolded his long legs and climbed down from the fence.

"'Blow 'em up, Uncle Milt,' commanded Applecheeks. 'We've got business that is mighty important.' The old man took up a great crinkly ram's horn, buried it in his whiskers, and blew a blast. When he done that he made me think o' the Angel Gabe a-blowin' the trump o' doom. He blowed three times.

"'Uncle Milt, you reckon you-all are any kin to old Harmon Bradley, the millionaire?'

"'Arkinsaw, Nance; most all the Bradley's I ever see war kin, excusin' yore

paw an' his people.' I began faintly to see light. Presently up across that forty-five degree farm came two more bewhiskered patriarchs. 'Those are Bob and Buck Bradley,' explained the girl. 'Tell 'em your story like you told it to Father.'

"I told 'em all I knew and asked 'em for ten thousand apiece if they found my information correct and got the money. They all seemed kind o' bewildered at first, but presently Bob Bradley said: 'Pap'll know.'

"'Arkinsaw, Bob,' trumpeted old Milt.

"We all went into the cabin, and there sitting before the fire was the great-grandfather of Methuselah. He was stone blind, deaf as a hitching post, and hadn't walked a step for fifteen years, but his attic seemed to be in a fine state of repair.

"'Pap! Oh, Pa-ap!' trumpeted old Milt. 'Here's little Nance what used to teach school yere. Tribulation Milt's little gal!'

"'E-eh?'

"'Tribulation Milt Bradley's gal!'

"'Yeh, I ben studyin', ben studyin' five year to try to figger out ef Tribulation Milt ain't some kin of our'n. Cain't see how 'e could be a Bradley and not be kinfolks.'

"'Pap! Say Pa-ap! Whose boy was Harmon Bradley?'

"'E-eh?'

"'Harmon Bradley! Whose boy was he?'

"'Hiram Bradley? Sanctified Hi, you mean?'

"'No-o! I said Harmon Bradley! Harr! Mann! Harmon Bradley!'

"The oracle was silent in the manner of all oracles except the Stone County Oracle. Finally it spoke: 'They was two Harm Bradleys. One was kilt in '67 in a still house fight daown on the Jeemes.'

"'T'other'n, Pap! Whose boy was t'other'n?'

"'He was ole Sid Bradley's boy. He run off wi' the Red Leggers and last I heerd he was gittin' rich in Kansas City.'

"'Was you an' Sid any kin?'

"'E-eh!'

"'Any kin-n! You an' Si-id?'

"'Arkinsaw, Milt, Arkinsaw. We's fust cousins. Sid was Uncle Bije's boy by his fust wife.'

"Just then we heard a noise in the road above us. 'Here, put your crosses to this paper if you want that fortune,' spoke up Applecheeks. While the patriarchs had been talking she had been busy writing, and the thing she had written was a contract whereby they agreed to pay me ten thousand dollars apiece in case they heired money from the Harmon Bradley estate. There were no provisos to the contract, except that she and I were to furnish them with such information as we could and do what we could to help them secure the money. The three made their marks with her for a witness, and she handed me the paper with a little flourish. I had made up my mind by that time to propose to her on our way home and drown myself in Coon River if she didn't accept me.

"By this time the cause of the noise above was visible. 'Whoa haw, Broad! Whoa haw, Jerry!' I looked out at the cabin door and saw old Hiram Gibbs and that other grand swami sitting very dignified in a big roadster. And Simm Knull, the still house man, had rigged a pole to the front axle and was pulling them slowly along with his old oxen, making about two hours a mile, and that chauffeur was still at the wheel looking as sour as if he'd eaten a barrel of dill pickles.

"There wasn't anything crooked about the deal Gibbs and his partner was on. All they wanted was proof that these were the real Bradleys, and Cherrylips and I soon had the grandfather of Methuselah talking under oath, securing 'em the dope they wanted. And presently the road was full o' people. It looked like a primary. First here come Homer Stotts muleback, then Cherrylips's father hossback, and then that surrey load of

Mayfield, Murray and Sharp, and then about a dozen others, some from Drayton and some from Southwest City and some from the county seat; and last of all, afoot, weary and wayworn, comes old Botts. 'Which way is it to Calamity Cross Roads?' he asks of the assembled company, not knowing he had arrove at his destination.

"'Just over the mountain about half a mile is the post office of that name,' answered Cherrylips sweetly.

"'Where's your hoss? Have you burnt 'im in five dollar Williams yet?' I makes inquiry; and at that he went ravin' mad.

"Well, to make a long story short, those three patriarchs got theirs, I got mine, and Tribulation Milt Bradley got his from Homer Stotts and Mayfield, Murray and Sharp. He held 'em for ten per cent. forfeit money, and could 'a' got more, but he got to feeling sorry for that bunch o' crooks. Yes, I married Applecheeks; that was her passed here in the big touring car a while ago; she's got a dairy farm out at Crystal Springs—you know the Crystal Springs Brand o' butter? That's hers.

"What did those patriarchs do with their money? Spent most of it in riotous living—passed some of it on for their heirs and assigns to spend likewise."

Honest Henry Honeycutt took his number tens down from the litter of papers and checker men, and I relighted my cigar, which had long since gone out.

The man who likes to mend the roof when it rains and to split his stove-wood when his fingers freeze will not miss the chance to sell his Liberty bonds on a temporary slump.—*Boston Herald.*

If Sing Sing can turn out shoes for $4.50 at a reasonable profit, why not send a few manufacturers to so good a school?—*Wall Street Journal.*

Maybe a policeman does his duty as somebody else sees it.—*Toledo Blade.*

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL MOMENT

By LEE PAPE

"THE mashed potatoes were dwindling as they described their orbit.

"Well, Mother Brooks," said Mr. Seevers, whose disposition had been mellowed by years of being gracious for business reasons along his butter and egg route, "I understand we'll soon be struggling along without you for a week."

"The fifteenth, we leave," nodded Mrs. Brooks, a widow twice removed, who had married a pessimist to make up for having married an optimist. "If I couldn't look forward to being waited on and carved for and swept up after, at least one week in the year, I'd lose all my interest in slaving for other people. And poor Luella certain'y needs the rest and the change, though I must say I got my own opinion of a firm that on'y gives their cashier one week's vacation."

"So've I, Ma," said her daughter grimly; and, on either side of her, a tall young man and a short young man, both wearing big literary spectacles with tortoise-shell trimmings, murmured sympathetically. Mr. Stiles and Mr. Hopper, who were roomers as well as boarders, shared the third-story-next-to-the-front. Both, to quote Miss Luella Brooks, were "tight fitting young men." Theirs was the perfect friendship that you will find only between very tall men and very short ones. Mr. Stiles may have been a shade the tighter fitting, or perhaps it was merely his superior height—as a tall slender tree, though really not so, appears slimmer than a short slender tree. He spent his days marshalling endless miles of figures from the high cane seat of a stool in a broker's office, while his little friend Hopper performed an almost identical function from a similar stool in a bank. The daily sum of their labors was equally valueless to them and to the history of the world, and left them equally, singularly undepressed. Stiles's pay envelope was heavier than his friend's by the weight of a silver half dollar, but, to balance that, he envied Hopper his two big daily moments,—when he ascended great flowing marble steps and passed through priceless bronze gates to his battalions of waiting figures, and when he left them, marking time till the morrow, to reissue through the same grand portals, to descend in leisurely, tight fitting nonchalance that marble sweep.

Harvey Stiles addressed Miss Brooks, "Have you decided for sure on Ocean Beach?"

"Sea Front Hotel," she answered Harvey. "We wrote there and we wrote to the Bounding Billows, and they both recommended themselves most highly in the circulars; but Ma thought the Bounding Billows sounded like it mightn't be a quiet place, so it's the Sea Front. And for mercy's sakes, don't you boys fail to come down!"

"Oh, we'll be there," Harvey assured her. "Won't we, Midge?"

"*With* bells," replied Hopper earnestly. Like all sensible small people, he took his reduced stature as a matter beyond mending and even humorously pretended to be proud of it, although secretly he preferred his original Christian name of Hilliard.

"Do I understand, Mr. Stiles," asked Mr. Green, the incipiently-bald and newly-married drug clerk, from the other end of the table, "do I understand that you and Mr. Hopper are planning to spend the first week of your vacation on a canoeing and camping trip?"

"Back to nature," Harvey assured him. "Live in bathing suits. Sleep out in the open on blankets. Eat nothing except what we cook ourselves. All the way back—how about it, Midge?"

"Ab-solutely," corroborated Hopper.

"And after that you're to join Mrs. Brooks and Luella at Ocean Beach?" inquired Mrs. Green, who sat next to her husband and took part in all his conversations.

"That's our schedule," replied Harvey; and a sound, like the ghost of a chuckle clearing its throat, ran around the table. It was a common secret that the friends and roommates were rivals for the affections of their landlady's daughter.

Harvey and Midge were late for supper every day that week. Each evening saw them bearing blankets, frying pans, indigestible matter in tins—all the impedimenta of a natural state of living. On alternate nights, as usual and by compact, each had his turn escorting Miss Brooks to one of the several moving picture theatres in the neighborhood. Luella had the ever shifting weekly repertory of them all at her fingers' ends. And on the night of the final Saturday, as a sort of till-we-meet-again party, the three of them went together to one of the big downtown picture houses, and afterwards to a café, where Luella sent a merry smile, each time around the polished dancing space, to the one left solitary at the table. One of Miss Brook's many charms was that she was a young woman of adaptable height. She did not look too small dancing with Harvey, and yet Midge could comfortably peer over her left shoulder to steer. Nay, on the way home—it was a lovely night winking with stars, and they walked—she even took an arm of each apparently without the slightest inconvenience.

The friends discussed this among others of her virtues as they reclined, the next night, on the less smoky side of their camp fire above the river bank. They still wore their literary spectacles, which flashed now and then like beacons as the flames leaped; but their faces were grimy, and there was nothing in the least tight fitting about their flannel shirts and formless khaki trousers.

"What gets me most about her," mused Hopper, as he reflectively refilled his pipe, "is the way she never knocks. Now most girls, when they get a fellow behind his back, they'll knock. But never once in all the time I've had her out, Harvey, has she said a word against you." Harvey frowned, and Midge finished hastily, "And I hope, Harvey, you can say the same of her about me."

"We've never discussed a thing except your good qualities," Harvey assured him. "And your funny qualities. You know, Midge, how you like to smoke great big cigars just as if you were a big six-footer, and how I've had to drag you away from every little German band on the street since that bump reader told you you were passionately fond of music."

Midge puffed in pensive silence. Harvey resumed: "When she plays for us to sing, Midge, and one of us sails off the key, the way she lights into the old piano like a sandstorm till we're back in line, as if nothin'd ever happened!"

Midge nodded with solemn slowness. "That's art, Harvey. Did you ever take notice how graceful she eats?—how dainty, and yet as if she enjoyed every bite? Did you ever take notice?—and when she drinks coffee, how her little finger's always out?"

"And nothing affected about it, either!" Harvey chimed in. "She don't *stick* it out—it's just out perfectly natural."

"Ab-solutely," said Midge.

They puffed for a while in silence, disturbed once by a cough from Midge as a sudden shift of wind blew the woodsmoke his way. Occasionally the swift black river sent them a sighing gurgle, and the giant wooded hills on the opposite bank seemed painted in India ink.

"All those stars, Midge," said Harvey. "Millions, eh?"

"And if we were up on one of 'em," mused Midge, "we'd think we were the works and this old earth was only a star."

"Just like now," nodded Harvey. "It's astronomy."

They drew on their pipes.

"Blondes always did affect me, Harvey. I was always more or less susceptible to 'em—one of those kind. And as I figure it, Luella is the Perfect Blonde. What is it about blondes, Harvey?"

"It's what you might call a certain indefinable something." Harvey answered thoughtfully. "There's some say they prefer brunettes, but they don't look you in the eye when they say it. I've read that brunettes have caused more changes in the world's history than any other class of women, but I've got my doubts, Midge."

"So've I, Harvey."

They drew on their pipes.

"Midge, there's something I want to tell you. I don't want you to think I haven't been square for not telling you before—I've been meaning to all along, and it's the only thing I ever held back. She let me kiss her good-night once. About two weeks ago, after we'd been to a Mary Pickford picture."

Hopper laid down his pipe and swallowed hard.

"Thanks, Harvey," he said at length. "I'm glad you told me. It makes it easier. It was after a Mary Pickford picture that she let me kiss her, too. I've been going to tell you for a month."

Harvey got up to do something to the fire. When he had settled himself again, he said, "She likes us both the same, Midge. So now the only question is, which one of us is going to have the luck to pop it to her at what you might call the psychological moment. For he'll be the one to get her. I know enough about women for that."

"'The time, the place and the girl,'" observed Midge.

"You said it, Midge. Personally, I don't complain about it being my turn next."

"You mean—on account of the ocean and all."

"The ocean, and the moon—it'll be full moon next week — everything, Midge."

"It'll be the best psychological moment you've had, Harvey," said Midge wistfully.

"You don't hold it against me, do you, Midge? It's not my fault that it just happens to be my turn."

"Sure not. Go to it, Harvey. All's fair in love and war. The second time I—I asked her—this'll make your third, Harvey—there was a great big, round, red moon. And then the trees and the fountain and all. It was a great psychological moment—or would have been if a big cloud hadn't of got in front of the moon and stayed there just as I was starting to wonder what would be the best way to break the news to you. I don't want to sound conceited, Harvey, but I think you ought to be pretty grateful to that cloud."

"I am, Midge. And I can return the favor, because some waves from a motor boat worked the same on me. It was that Memorial Day time, in the canoe. A canoe and twilight, Midge, you can't beat that for a psychological moment—barring interference. I didn't notice the rollies coming, so I didn't have time to take them right; and they jiggled the canoe and scared Luella pale. That left me in strong, of course!"

"Naturally," murmured Midge sympathetically.

And very soon after that they rolled themselves up in their blanket beds and added the gentle sighs of slumber to the hushed symphony of night.

They stayed their full week back with nature, far from the softening artificialities of the tight fitting city. Blisters sprang on their hands from much paddling; and after the second day a feeling of weight fastened on their stomachs and made its home there, returning, after short absences, like a bird of lead to its nest. They shivered themselves awake in the black of midnight and were annoyed awake by flies at the first streak of dawn. But, joining in a diplomatic conspiracy of silence, neither affected to notice as the other rubbed a surreptitious hand over his leaden feeling; each nursed without words his painful reminders of the brief kisses of hot frying pans.

"Pretty fine, heh, Midge?" Harvey would say as they filled pipes after a hearty supper of fried bacon, boiled potatoes and beans.

"Pretty fine," Midge would agree, turning his eyes dreamily from the still unwashed agate, iron and tin ware. And in fact, sometimes the heavy feeling did not visit them until a full hour after meals.

And then—two coats of tan more arrestingly rich, as the friends sped across sandy flats to Ocean Beach and Luella, never graced Jersey train.

It was with a preoccupied air that Harvey had hoisted Midge's suitcase after his own into the high brass bracket. Harvey had something on his mind. Several times during the journey he came out of a brown study to pause on the brink of Midge's vivacious stream of chatter. At last he took the plunge.

"Midge, I've got a plan."

"You're the fellow gets 'em, Harvey."

"I've had this one for several days, Midge. Or at least, I've been getting it for several days. You know that talk we had—all about psychological moments?"

"'The time, the place and the girl,'" Midge nodded wisely.

"Well, that started me thinking. There's no psychological moment, Midge, like after you've rescued a girl from drowning. It's a phychological moment, you might say, that lasts all the rest of the day. To make a long story short, Midge, I'll rescue her in the morning, and in the evening I'll propose to her."

There was a dramatic pause.

"But," Midge suggested faintly, "supposing she don't drown—I mean start to drown?"

"Ah, Midge, that's where *you* come in!"

"Me?"

"It's a lot to ask of you, Midge, I realize that. But as you said, all's fair in love and war. And it wouldn't seem very square to you, would it, Midge, if I went and got somebody else to push her in? Now, Midge, take it calm! We've always helped each other out all we could so far, haven't we? Didn't you wear my brand new dollar and a half tie that I hadn't even unwrapped yet, your last time? Well, can I help it if the seashore and everything happens to be in my favor?"

"Sea *shore*, yes, Harvey, but—"

"Now, Midge, listen calm. Who knows most about women, you or me?"

"You, Harvey. But—"

"Well then, no buts. In a matter of this kind, a man that don't take advantage of an opportunity don't deserve the opportunity. An how do you know, Midge, how do you know *you're* not going to have another turn down here? I don't claim to be infallible."

Midge's face brightened more than Harvey secretly thought the premises warranted.

"Gee, Harvey! And if I do, will you think up one for me—a psychological moment? I don't pretend to know as much about them as you do."

"Sure I will, Midge," Harvey promised heartily. "Certainly I will!"

"Well then, Harvey, I'll do it."

They shook hands.

"Ah hah!" cried Luella. "Men! And both for me! Honest, boys, wherever the Isle of Man is, it's somewhere else."

The newcomers had found Ocean Beach one of those sheer north Jersey coastlines where one bathes clinging for dear life to a rope, where one is either out of the water or in it up to one's waist. And the Sea Front Hotel was really not more than three minutes' walk from the ocean's edge.

"Just in time for supper," smiled Mrs. Brooks. "They set an elegant table."

That evening a wonderful lemon colored moon made gold of the beach and quick-silver of the ocean. The four went strolling on the narrow boardwalk.

"Aren't you *crazy* about that moon?" sighed Luella.

Harvey looked up at it soulfully. Midge said dreamily, "No light of its own at all, the moon hasn't."

"Go on!" scoffed Luella. "What do you call all that on the water?"

"It's from the sun," Midge explained.

"A touch o' heat, I s'pose, Midge," said Luella kindly; and Harvey made violent efforts to locate the sun in the starry heavens.

"My first husband used to say his troubles were joys on nights like these," commented Mrs. Brooks. "But lor', how the sight of a beautiful moon, and people raving about it, used to make my second husband swear. And he could swear. Couldn't he, Luella?"

"Like a Trojan," replied her daughter.

"What's that?" Harvey asked suddenly.

"A little dock," said Luella.

"Deep, out there?"

"Thirty feet. You couldn't get *me* on it."

"Luella always did act timid about standing over water," said her mother. "Even as a child. We used to think it was hereditary. Some things are."

"We'll take a little stroll out there tomorrow and look it over," said Harvey.

"You couldn' get me on that thing for all the king's money," Luella repeated.

Harvey, as though he considered the entire subject unmomentous, affected a careless laugh; but as he and Midge prepared for bed he explained that getting Luella out on that dock was probably his only means of realizing the great plan.

The next day assiduously occupied itself in raining, and the hotel veranda waxed quite neighborly in discussions of the advantages possessed by the city over great open areas like the country and the seashore. But Wednesday morning's sun was hot and brilliant, and everybody congratulated everybody on being at the seashore on a day when the city was in for so certain a grilling.

Mrs. Brooks announced her intention of remaining on the nice shady veranda with her embroidery and the morning papers. Luella and Harvey and Midge, in bathing suits, were soon enjoying the warm sand. Harvey and Midge still wore their tortoise-shell glasses. A few hundred yards up the beach the little dock was visible.

"Anybody feel like a little walk?" said Harvey. "Kind of monotonous, sitting in one spot."

"Thanks for the compliment," observed Luella.

"For you, I mean," Harvey amended hastily. "Monotonous for you. As far as we're concerned, gosh, you'd have to tear us away. How about that, Midge?"

"Ab-solutely," said Midge.

"Well, if it's a case of vice versa," Luella smiled graciously as she rose, "which way?"

Harvey led them down the beach, away from the dock. Midge was lost in admiration of his diplomacy, for a succession of stone jetties made the walking in that direction very unsatisfactory, and they were soon headed back toward the dock. The sand was dotted with bathers, in couples, in groups, with prone and supine white figures patheti-

cally expecting the sun to burn them a handsome brown instead of a painful red.

"I always wonder," Luella mused, "what it is makes couples on the beach lose all sense of privacy. And what it is makes a perfect stranger, almost, expect you to merely look pleasant while he lays his head in your lap. As if every couple you saw, even if they've just been introduced, was a regular Anthony and Cleopatra on a barge."

Harvey sighed.

"Something in the air," suggested Midge.

"Here's that dock," said Harvey.

They stopped. The dock was a very narrow, very rickety, very risky looking affair about thirty feet long, on log piles. A boy in a bathing suit and a vivid orange sweater was sitting on it with his bare legs dangling over the side, fishing.

"Do you mean to say," Harvey addressed Luella, "do you mean to say you're actually *afraid* to walk out to the end of that dock?"

"The end?" said Miss Brooks with a shiver. "I'd be dead before I got to the middle."

"You imagine it," Harvey assured her. He looked at Midge.

"Ab-solutely," said Midge.

"What say we try it?" Harvey suggested brightly. "Take hold of my arm."

Luella stepped back in alarm.

"Harvey! Are you perfectly crazy? *No!*"

"Luella," said Harvey with reproving sadness, "you're acting childish. You really ought to be ashamed of yourself." He paused suggestively.

"You really ought, Luella," said Midge. "It's only a dock."

"And if you go out this once," Harvey urged, "you'll never be afraid to stand over water again. Don't you know it's only by forcing yourself to overcome foolish fears that you can conquer them? Don't you know it's only a case of mind over matter?"

Miss Brooks replied that she did not know it and that she was in no humor for experiments. She refused to show the slightest sign of wavering until Harvey, with occasional assistance from Midge, had reasoned for ten earnest minutes.

"Oh, well," she capitulated at last. "Seeing you take it so to heart. And you really think it'll have an influence?"

"It's sure to," said Harvey.

"Ab-solutely," said Midge.

She took a firm grip on Harvey's arm with both hands and the three fared slowly onto the dock, Midge a trifle to the rear.

"Well?" said Harvey. "It's not so bad, is it? It's not so bad?"

"I thought it would be worse," Luella admitted. And soon, with occasional little squeals, and still tightly gripping Harvey's arm, she allowed herself to be led out to the very edge.

"Who don't deserve a Carnegie medal?" she shivered deliciously.

"Try to slacken up a bit on my arm," suggested Harvey. He sent a glance back over his shoulder. Midge was looking doubtfully down at a piece of loose boarding, wondering if it could be stumbled over naturally and effectively, and what would happen to his toe.

"You're holding me tighter," said Harvey. "It'll do you more good if you try to stand by yourself."

"It's doing me enough good as it is," replied Luella. "I think I want to go back now."

Harvey turned part way round and made a rapid but significant face. Midge frowned worriedly. He had made a tentative effort to stumble over the loose board and found it impracticable.

"Take me back!" demanded Luella.

Harvey shot Midge a really appalling glance.

"Just a minute," he soothed Luella. "This is what you might call the real test now. Just another minute. And a little looser, can't you?"

The boy in the orange sweater was still absorbedly fishing over the side. Midge's wildly roaming eyes, chancing on him, became alight with inspiration. He hurried over to him and bent down.

"Say, boy."

"What?" said the boy, who at that moment thought he saw his bob agitate itself.

"I bet I can beat you wrestling."

"I bet you can, too," admitted the boy.

"Let's try it," offered Midge.

"I'm fishing," said the boy.

"Let's try it," Midge repeated firmly, and seized him under the arms.

"I'm fishing!" shouted the boy wrathfully. "I got a bite! Don't wanna rassle!"

"You got to wrestle!" gritted Midge as he dragged him to his feet and began shoving him toward the end of the dock. The boy, still clutching his pole, kicked back desperately.

"Had a bite, darn you! Had a bite!"

"Wrestle!" panted Midge. With much difficulty he turned him around to a more gladiatorial position and the next moment they crashed violently into Luella, who, alarmed at the noise, was just turning round to investigate in spite of Harvey's earnest efforts to keep her attention directed to a ship disappearing over the horizon. There was nothing for her to do but go over with a hair-raising scream. And, although she had a death grip on Harvey's arm, he managed, by dint of a mighty equilibristic feat at the last possible fraction of a second, to stay behind. All in all, there was quite an exhibition of difficult balancing, for Midge and the boy also had much ado to stay on. Luella made a fine splash.

Harvey handed Midge his tortoise-shell glasses.

"Coming!" he sang out, and went, with a deliberate, perfect dive.

"Harvey'll save you!" Midge called down cheerily.

"Help! Man overboard! Lady drowning!" shrieked the boy, dancing wildly. Then he flung off his orange sweater and postured on the edge of the dock with one hand on his chest and the other upflung towards heaven.

"To the rescue!" he shouted.

"Hey!" cried Midge in consternation. But it was too late; the boy, his feet pointing respectively northwest and southwest in the poorest sort of diving form, was defacing Harvey's neatly cut arc.

Harvey regarded the new arrival with surprise and displeasure. Having succeeded, several feet under water, in disengaging his neck from Luella's fervid clasp, he had brought her to the surface with his right arm skillfully hooked under her chin in the manner advocated by the best authorities.

"That ain't no way," said the boy. "Turn her on her back and tow her in by the hair."

"Who's doing this?" asked Harvey icily.

"I'm on'y tellin' you," said the boy meekly. Treading water briskly, he addressed the sputtering Luella: "Are you drownding, lady?"

"Mind, now!" warned Harvey, and began swimming in with arduously feeble strokes, for he had only the length of the dock to go and the ocean was like a lake.

"That ain't no way, all right," said the boy regretfully as he kept pace.

Harvey eyed him balefully.

"If I get one kick at you!"

"Leave it to the lady," defended the boy. *"Wouldn'* you sooner be towed in by the hair, lady?" Then, unresentfully, he tried to make it easier for Harvey by catching hold of Luella's feet. It was Harvey's foot that he caught, squarely in the chest. He disappeared, but not for long.

"Hey!" he spluttered. "You look out who you're kickin'!"

Midge leaned over the side of the dock.

"Get away from there, can't you?" he

called down. "Mind your own business."

"Let him be careful who he's kickin'," retorted the boy. His sudden feints and mysterious disappearance, as the rescue proceeded, were so distracting that Harvey suddenly realized Midge's sibilant signals of distress must have been going on for some time. Midge was trying to telegraph that Luella was strangling, a bit of news Luella was also endeavoring to impart by pulling at the arm encircling her neck. Harvey loosened the arm so suddenly and thoroughly that he found himself alone with the boy on the surface of the water, and the submarine ceremony of disentangling his neck from Luella's clasp had to be repeated.

"Didn't I tell you that wasn't no way?" said the boy; but Harvey, deciding that he wasn't near enough, pretended not to have heard him. Meanwhile the perturbed Midge had dashed off the dock and through the fair sized crowd now lining the beach, and was splashing his way out to meet them, when the boy made a last desperate attempt to partake in the rescue. Harvey's foot again found its mark, but the whole-souled kick forced Luella's long suffering head under once more. Midge, managing to reach one of her hands, gave it a shoreward tug as Harvey assisted her to her feet.

"Gee whizz, Harvey," said Midge reproachfully as he handed him his dripping spectacles. A few moments later the three of them were on the beach, the center of a solicitous and rapidly increasing crowd, through which the boy, having redonned his sweater and recovered his fishing pole, industriously worked his way.

"How—how do you feel?" said Harvey.

"C-cold," shivered Luella.

"Cold?" said Midge briskly. For the second time in a crucial moment his eyes fell on the boy in the orange sweater.

"Go 'way!" cried the boy, backing precipitately. "Didn't I tell you I didn'—"

"Give me that sweater!" commanded Midge, who practically had it already.

"I thought you wanted to rassle," said the boy relievedly. He cheerfully drew his other arm out, and Midge draped the sweater about Luella's shoulders.

"Come on," he said. "Out o' this mob."

An unpleasant, persistent man had been shouting for a barrel to roll her on, and Luella was quite ready to go. They walked slowly up the beach, the boy following with his fishing rod on his shoulder and his eye on his sweater. Harvey, a step or so to one side, kept glancing askance at Luella.

She was silent and thoughtful until she chattered: "M-Midge, it certainly was b-brave the way you c-came after m-me, and you not knowing how to s-swim or anything! And getting this s-sweater for me and taking me away from that awful m-mob. It was th-thoughtful, Midge! Any time you want to ask me w-what you asked me that time in the p-park——"

THE CAPTIVATION OF WASH HANKS

By JANE HICKS

ASH HANKS, humped upon his wagon seat, spat and bade his old gray nag "Gid epp" as each of the vehicles following his own turned off the main road of the Virginia mountain late one September afternoon. By virtue of being husband of the deceased, he had led the slow, silent procession to and from the "burying ground," speaking to his horse alone, and that only when the leavetakings of the neighbors had made him feel that something was required of him. The last one having turned off, Wash continued slowly and joltingly up the shady, stony road until horse and wagon seemed to run down, like pieces of old machinery, at the gate rudely constructed of small beech limbs, with shoeleather hinges. He eased down from the wagon seat and scraped the gate back across the brown dirt to the hard little ridge of accumulated scrapings.

He was home! The damp coolness of mountain evenings was beginning to spread in the air; the mellow golden light and long shadows seemed like tangible, live things. A few chickens and pigs foraging restlessly around the little clearing emphasized the hopeless shiftlessness of the weather-beaten cabin, the toppling shed, the chicken boxes, the tumble-down fences, and the grassless and littered yard. Several deformed, scrubby apple and peach trees forlornly told of erstwhile spasmodic attempts at providence —or were the trees mere accidents?

Wash laid his greenish coat on the seat of the wagon, unhitched and turned the emaciated horse loose in the yard, left the wagon—Piggy Scruggs's wagon —where it stood, and taking his coat, slouched toward the house. The pigs grunted as they watched him; the chickens followed with low, staccato notes, pleading for their supper. The horse, that was his only income, looked after him dejectedly. Wash stopped at the edge of the small, low porch. It had no railing and no steps. He sat on the edge where he had always sat while Lizzie worked. Nothing but his little brown, dusty clearing and trees—the numberless trees of the mountain! A curl of light smoke down to the left told him that Piggy Scruggs was getting her supper.

Still, the chickens were asking for food, but Wash seemed to be waiting for something. Lizzie had always fed the chickens till she was "took good an' sick," and even then, every day, she had told Wash how much, or rather how little—to give them. She had always told Wash to do the things he did, everything, that is, but smoke his pipe, which he seemed to do not as a result of thought, but of instinct. Now, he missed direction! No matter how long he sat, no one would tell him to feed the chickens or the pigs or the horse, nor to hoe the little, mangy-looking garden, nor to go over to Wiggins's for the daily quart of milk. Neither would anyone call him to prepare meals. He began to think of Lizzie.

"Lizzie always was a-ailin'," he had told his neighbor, Piggy Scruggs, when she had come at Lizzie's death to compare the details with those of her husband's, which had occurred several months before.

"Was it a misery in her chest? Sam

Scruggs's was something awful!" Piggy was very stout and sociable and gaily dressed, with her hair parted on the side and her waist open far enough to insure against her getting overheated.

"'Twa'n't no place special," Wash told her, scratching, on the back of his head, a spot that always itched when he spoke, and turning to go out upon the porch. He did not leave because he minded being in the room with Lizzie's body or with Piggy while she "fixed" it, but he was not a talker. His conversations were to the ear what his dull gray eyes, leathery, murky skin and scant, colorless hair were to the eye. Lizzie had not talked, either. She had just worked. Now, he missed her.

He turned and looked into the shadowy little room—living room, dining room, bedroom and kitchen, it was—dimly discerned the home-made bed with the suggestive depression in the middle, saw the cup and the plate on the table where he had eaten the frugal meal that Piggy Scruggs had prepared for him before he started "totin' the coffin box to the buryin' ground." It was lonely. He turned away again and looked at the smoke curling up from Piggy Scruggs's chimney. He wondered what she was cooking. She was a mighty strong woman, able, Wash reckoned, to do "a sight o' work." Sam Scruggs had been a hard worker, but Wash made no connection between the two facts. He pulled out his pipe, lighted and puffed it as the twilight deepened.

Suddenly, he heard his gate being dragged open. He pulled himself up and slouched over to an apple tree whence he could see John Wiggins coming with the milk.

"Reckon ye didn't feel like comin' fer it 's evenin'," Wiggins sympathized, ridding himself of a large amount of tobacco juice. "Thought I'd jes 'tote 'tawn over toe ye."

Wash took the bucket, looked steadily into it for a few moments, then, removing his pipe from his mouth, drank the milk. He had not gathered the eggs to give John in payment.

"Warmish," he remarked, returning the bucket. He spat, slowly, as he would, replaced his pipe, let his hands slide deep into his trousers pockets, and looked at the smoke rising from Piggy's chimney.

"Wal," John broke the silence, "reckon I'll be movin' on." He waited a few minutes longer. "Good tun-out, 'twas." He knew Wash's aversion to spoken words, but, he reasoned hopefully, if a man can't talk when his wife has a funeral and about how many turned out for it, when will he talk? But his lead fell dead.

"Reckon ye'll be lonely," he ventured again.

"Yas," Wash rewarded him, attending to that spot on the back of his head.

John felt that he had struck a fertile vein.

"Yas," he coaxed, "ye'll do it all yerself, now."

He waited. Wash only pulled at his pipe. John looked at him out of the corner of his eye. He felt that being a pallbearer entitled one to something.

"Wal, reckon I'll be goin'," he concluded. He thought of his eggs, but he didn't mention them. "Comin' over to the cuttin' to-night, ain't ye?" he asked, in turning.

"What fer?" Wash asked around his pipestem. He had not heard John invite the others at the burying.

"Goin' to cut the watermelons," John told him. "Fust ones, and pretty good, too, they soun' like. All the folks a-comin'. Bring yer fiddle along."

Wash scratched his head and pointed with his thumb over his shoulder down the mountain.

"Buried ma wife," he said. A dim feeling of respect for the conventions seemed to prompt the words. His feelings were like aged ruins.

"Better come," John urged, as his eyes roved about the shiftless clearing. "It'll

cheer ye up a bit. Lonesome here." With both hands, as the bucket slid down one arm, he took off what the moths and the weather had left of a dull felt hat and, after a moment, replaced it further over his forehead. Then, moving off:

"Bring yer fiddle. We'll want some chunes."

Wash stood alone and motionless while damp night crept up over the mountain. Clear and ominous from afar came the baying of a hound. Slackly, Wash went back to his seat on the edge of the porch. The chickens were going noisily and restlessly to bed; a pig loudly crunched an apple that had just fallen. Wash went in and lighted the lamp. It sputtered and smoked, for it needed oil. Reaching for his fiddle on the corner shelf, he puffed out the feeble flicker and returned to the porch. He did not draw the bow, but rested the fiddle across his lap, his hands on its ends. For sometime he sat.

A peal of laughter. It was Piggy's, and came from the direction of John Wiggins's. "Folks a'comin' to the cuttin'," it told Wash. Another laugh, a man's. Wash walked slowly around to the back corner of the cabin and dodgingly peered through the dark to where a small twinkle, caught now and then through scarcely shifting trees, marked Wiggins's house. As he straightened up, Piggy's laugh came again. Yes, Piggy was a good worker—a good, strong woman—and Sam Scruggs had left things so that she could make a good living, more than she would need for just herself. She must live lonely. He looked around furtively. Loneliness was creeping, tightening about him like a shroud.

He went back to the porch and got his fiddle. The call of companionship was to him like the sight of food to a hungry animal. Unconsciously he quickened his steps as he left his gate behind in the darkness. A sluggish fusion of ideas suddenly brought him to wonder if any of Lizzie's kin would be there. He stopped—the theater of a miserable conflict between his inclination, his duty, and his fear of what they might say to him. He had long since ceased to smart under their vituperations, accused of being the laziest man alive, and scolded because Lizzie was working herself to death for him as wasn't worth it. But their tongues were sharp, and he didn't know what they might say on this occasion. Then, suddenly, inclination snatched and held on high an idea, bright and clear. It was all Wash's own, and it was to him like a defensive weapon caught from the hand of a death-dealing foe. He turned his steps toward Wiggins's. "And besides," feebly flourishing a weaker weapon, "they want my fiddlin'."

"Here he is." Piggy Scruggs announced his arrival from the little vine-covered porch. She was livelier than her neighbors, for she went "down" oftener than they. Her sister's large, jolly family lived at the foot of the mountain.

"I was jest a-bettin' middlin' to butter ye'd be here," she laughed loudly. She had on the same bright pink waist and bright blue cotton skirt that she had worn to the burying.

Wash laid his fiddle on the porch, spat, gripped his pipe in one corner of his mouth, and, with the awkwardness of unused muscles, gave his shoulders a hitch and slid his thumbs into his vest armholes.

"Wal," he drawled, furtively sighting Lizzie's kin as one hand slipped behind head, "Lizzie always *did* say as I set aroun' too much. I thought, now, as how she's went—"

After a short pause for comprehension, several admitted, "Yas, she did."

Wash drew a long puff, pulled his chair up near to Piggy's with the sliding looks and movements of a dog recalled for a pat, after receiving a kick, and began his fiddling. The rest resumed their stale jokes and their coarse fun, nudging one another occasionally.

"Wash a-makin' up to Piggy."

Wash was saying never a word, just a fiddlin'; but in his tunes and his movements was a new spirit—the spirit of purpose.

At the end of the evening, he left with Piggy and her sister's half-grown boy who was "staying the summer" with her, doing the plowing and the chores.

"Gosh," Piggy began in valley slang, "won't I be glad to hit that feather bed. That bed's good sleepin'. I can't make out how nobody kin sleep on a corn-shucks bed." (Wash's and Lizzie's was of corn shucks.) "'Specially in the winter time. Sam Scruggs used to say as no matter how hard he'd of worked, he'd know he'd feel good soon's he got in our bed. Gosh, it's good. Just lay there. Don't never wanter git up of a mornin'. I says sometimes, ef somebody was only to bring me my bacon and cabbage and corn pone while I was a-layin' there—m-m-M! I got my whole cellar half full o' cabbages, pretty near, for the winter; and the hogs gittin' ready to kill. I'll eat this winter. Whew! Won't I eat, though!"

They had reached Wash's gate. He spat, scratched his head below his hat and left them. He remembered that the lamp was empty. He found the corner shelf for his fiddle, and put his hat and coat on the table as he bumped against it in the dark. He did not take off his Sunday pants nor shoes nor shirt. Lizzie was not there to tell him to. He bolted the door, found the bed, and lay down as he was. For the first time, he noticed the bumps in his corn-shuck mattress. How soft a feather bed would have been to his joints and angles. He thought of the cabbage and pork and other things for the winter, or, rather, sensed them sluggishly as he dropped off to sleep.

When he awoke in the morning, chilled and stiff and hungry, he sat on the edge of the bed and looked at the cupboard. He knew that there was a little cornmeal left from the year's supply. The scant, new crop had not been taken to the mill. He knew there was a little salt to make palatable an egg which he might find in one nest-box or another. He knew there was nothing else to eat. Yesterday's soiled dishes were still on the table. His hat and coat had been laid on them in the dark. There was no one building a fire nor cooking the meal nor hunting the eggs. Slowly and painfully he rose and went out upon the porch. Over the autumn treetops curled up the line of blue smoke from Piggy's chimney. Wash went back for his hat, closed the door, and with never a glance at the hungry chickens and animals—what rudder Lizzie had left him—surrendered himself to the current.

Before he reached the new, well-hung gate to Piggy's clearing, he saw her come to the door of the house and look out in his direction. Piggy had a little flower garden in front of her house, protected from her animals by a rustic fence. As Wash opened the gate she came to the door again, a sizzling skillet in her hand.

"Jest a-settin' down. If ye're hungry, ye're welcome."

"Wal, I could eat a bite," Wash reckoned, going up the porch steps and in to the table, already laid for three.

"Ye walk like ye got the rheumatiz," Piggy remarked. "Middlin' to butter ye slept cold last night. Men folks would die right off if women folks wasn't here to take keer on 'em," with a loud laugh. "Sam Scruggs taken sick them nights I went down, and when I come back, I couldn't never git him up again." She put a huge piece of pone on Wash's plate, soaking it in the hot bacon fat. "This here boy's picked up since he's been here with me," she remarked, indicating her sister's boy. "Don't know what I'm goin' to do fer a man, now he's a-goin'." Wash held the ready mouthful poised a moment between his mouth and the plate. Piggy went on. "He's got to git his schoolin'—"

The boy, a great, red-faced, raw-boned specimen, opened his mouth in astonished protest, but Piggy waved a fat hand and arm at him.

"You jest shet right up. I know what yer mammy told me An' I can't stay here 'thout no man. Looks like I don't know *what* to do. So lonely and so cold all winter. 'Tain't so much work as 'tis lonely. Eatin' by myself."

Wash sat for a while after he had finished his breakfast, smoking his pipe and watching Piggy as she hustled about, cleaning up. Lizzie hadn't been so lively. He looked through the open doorway into the next room. The feather bed was a foot thick, and smooth and inviting, with a red, white and green quilt on it.

Wash rose. "Thank ye kindly fer the victuals," he said, and left.

Piggy watched him from the door. *She* was not the kind to ask *no* man if he was coming back, but if he knew what was good for him. Anyhow, he'd better fetch her wagon home. She didn't give it to him just cause she let him tote that box down the mountain in it.

Several hours later, she heard the slow jolting of a wagon. She reckoned Wash was fetching hers home. She looked out and saw the wagon swaying over the stony road, threatening every minute to spill its load.

"Fetched yer fixins, did ye?" Piggy called lightly from the doorway. "I 'lowed when ye got up thar an' seed how lonely 'twar, ye'd be back."

She went out to help him unload. Together, they turned the chickens loose with her chickens, the pigs with her pigs, and the horse into the lot with hers. They put the chairs and the table on the ground. Wash immediately sat down on one of the chairs.

"Jes might's well draw the wagon in thar," Piggy said, pointing to the weather-proof shed. "We'll use mine when we go down to the preacher's arter dinner." Alone, she drew the wagon under cover. "Better come in an' res' yerself," she advised on her way back.

She picked up the table and strode off with it through the garden gate. Wash smiled a little—not a mean smile, but one of content—as he followed her with a chair. He put it on the porch, sat on it, and, scratching his head and spitting, said:

"Lively here. Nicer'n up thar. 'Tain't so pore."

THE OBITUARIANS

By BENJAMIN LEEMING

URGATROYD—Murgatroyd—Mrs. Murgatroyd!"

Montgomery Ratner looked up from his apple strudel and coffee. An unusual name always interested him.

"Murgatroyd—Mrs. Murgatroyd!" The bell-boy's notes became louder as he entered the dining room, and Montgomery Ratner wondered just where he had heard that name before. He called the boy over to him and asked, "What is that name you just called?"

"Mrs. Murgatroyd."

"Spell it."

"M-u-r-g-a-t-r-o-y-d!"

"I don't know the lady." And dismissing the boy, he produced a note book and pencil, selected a blank page and spread the name very deliberately across it. Putting the note book and pencil back into his pocket, he once more gave his attention to the neglected dessert.

Finishing his dinner, he sauntered out through the rotunda of the hotel to the board-walk, bent upon the maximum amount of diversion that could be squeezed into the few remaining hours of his two day's sojourn. Long Beach was where he usually spent his week ends.

As he was a devotee of esthetics, his perceptions enjoined him to a single-minded contemplation of the beautiful in nature and art—the sea and sky and the pretty girls, which were there a-plenty. Of course, Ratner was too conscious of his own lack of youth and pulchritude to think that every girl he fell in love with would love him in return, but, still, no one could tell what might happen; an air of prosperity will often attract where the graces of youth go unnoticed. Many such cases could be cited.

Presently, he realized that he was not quite himself. His perceptions lacked their usual clarity, he was in no condition of mind to discriminate. It seemed that all the girls, not to mention the sea and sky, were lacking in interest. Today, they were all alike to him, for the chambers of his memory were in an uproar—the name of "Mrs. Murgatroyd" reverberating through every cranny of his brain.

It was part of his business to learn of the affairs of certain people. "Why is it that I can't forget business when I want to?" he asked himself plaintively.

With an impatient shake of his head, he stopped and jabbed the end of his cane into the wood pavement, then turned abruptly up a side street that led to the business section of the sea-resort town. Twice he stopped to ask of store keepers the way to the public library.

Of the librarian he requested the file of the New York Herald, and was directed to another room. There he found himself within a veritable maze of shelves and high racks, without a guide in sight, and the time of departure for his train to the city near at hand. Methodically he started at the row nearest the windows, and scrutinized each label and title as it appeared, stopping occasionally to express his irritation at some evidence of lack of system or careless handling.

So intense was his interest and so swiftly did he cast his eyes from title to title that he did not become aware of another presence in the room until a gray

mass impinged itself upon his right eye. He blinked, then turned to see that it was the figure of a girl. She was only six feet away, and his critical eye took her in at a glance. He saw a pair of dainty gray shoes, gray silk stockings, a short—a very short silk skirt and a dream of a hat. She turned to him and smiled, and he inhaled a breath through his teeth as if the resplendence of her beauty pained him, then slightly bowed with all the abandon his rotundity would permit. What a fascinating creature! Approaching nearer, he saw something bright in one of her hands—a pair of scissors. She was cutting an item of news from one of the newspapers, a thing against the regulations in any library, and to him a most unethical thing to do; but for the moment the glory of her presence overawed his sense of duty; he even felt disposed to help her. As he approached her, she displayed irritation and tore out the clipping with her free hand, then tripped away nervously towards the door.

"Ah, naughty-naughty!" he called after her.

She turned around and bestowed another glorious smile on him. Such an opportunity for acquaintance could not go a-begging, and he hurried after her; but she moved so swiftly that when he had reached the street door she was fully a quarter block away, and showed not the least inclination for dalliance.

Then the name of the other woman recast its spell upon him, and realizing the shortness of time at his disposal, he hurried back to his task. Eventually he found the file of his search, and after turning over four months of dates, he placed a finger upon a notice in the obituary columns which he promptly copied into his note book. It read as follows:

MURGATROYD—On Friday, March 26th, at 807 East 58th Street, Manhattan, John William Murgatroyd, the beloved husband of Anna Haydee Murgatroyd, in the 67th year of his age. Funeral Sunday at 11 A. M., at Bulson's Chapel, Lexington Avenue. Denver, Pueblo, Leadville and Butte papers please copy.

His greedy mind, long habituated to take advantage of every shred of fact or idea of which memory, suggestion or imagination might give a hint, was now appeased. It was a relief to know that the Mrs. Murgatroyd of the Long Beach hotel could be the widow of the mining promoter whose obituary was before him. Verification could easily be accomplished at his office. So he put away his note book and pencil and looked at his watch to find that eight more minutes remained to him before it was necessary to start for his train. He then moved over to the file that had received the attention of the girl in gray.

As he fingered the pages which she had touched the foolish possibility of finding something that belonged to her, occurred to him, but the mutilated page was the only evidence of her having been there. He made a note of the date at the head of the page, in order that he could procure a duplicate copy on his arrival at New York. His curiosity concerning the girl was backed by a strong desire to claim her acquaintance on his next trip.

"EDDIE," said Mrs. Murgatroyd, as they fell out of the first dance of the evening, "I'd like to get acquainted with that Van Pelt gentleman."

"What—that old piece of cheese, the millionaire groceryman?" sneered Eddie Fillaner. "What's the idea? I've presented too many men to you already; I'm getting jealous."

"Silly," she purred, squeezing his arm, "there he is now. Let us walk towards that door, then he'll pass us."

She led him forward to within a few feet of her object. He was an old but distinguished looking man.

"Hello, Mr. Van Pelt!" called out Eddie, cordially, offering his hand.

"Hello—hello," echoed the millionaire groceryman, in his raw, piping voice, "how are you, Mr.— Mr.—"

"Fillaner," prompted Eddie. "I'll sure have to change my name. It seems such a 'bun' to remember, doesn't it?"

Mrs. Murgatroyd stood by Eddie's side, smiling a good-natured interest in the passage of greetings, and Van Pelt smiled back at her tentatively; then, with less aplomb than was usual, Eddie announced, "Mrs. Murgatroyd, allow me to present Mr. Van Pelt."

She at once started a conversation with him in a free and easy manner, and Eddie was stunned when he saw them walk away, her arm in his, through the door and on to the board-walk. He bit his lip in vexation. "Pshaw! I ain't jealous!" he spat out promptly, as if such a thing were impossible. "But gosh, I don't like it." Then with a smile of contempt, he gazed across the room, full of women of all ages, any one of whom required less than a hint of an opportunity to beset him for the favor of a dance. "Gee, but she's got lots of money, and I can't let an old fossil like him get ahead of me."

His bruised pride hurt because of her preference for the old man's company. Wasn't his company more desirable, for wasn't he the idol of every dancing floor in New York and the most sought after man at Long Beach? He wondered if it was the old man's money bags? Hardly that. The widow of old Murgatroyd, the mining promoter, surely had enough of her own. Was it coquetry? Ah, the little devil. . . . Thus reflecting, a protective instinct warned against standing thus alone in full view of his feminine admirers, and involuntarily, as it were, he moved toward a side door; but he had been seen, and half a dozen fair hands dragged him back to his kingdom.

He did not see Mrs. Murgatroyd again until luncheon time the next day. Seated alone at his usual table by the largest window, he saw her enter, and seemingly quite oblivious to his presence, prepare to seat herself at a table not more than six feet away from his. He arose immediately and stepped over to her side to claim the pleasure of her company. She looked provokingly fascinating, as she invited him to take a seat beside her.

"What's the sad word?" he angled.

"Oh, nothing—just business. It's such a bother, and I'm no business person," she explained with a sigh.

"Can't I help you?"

"Oh, no, Eddie, but I thank you just the same."

"But it wouldn't be any trouble to me. I've lots of spare time. Do you think I don't know anything but dancing?"

"I—never thought about you—in that way."

"What, as a business man? Why not? Forget this jazzing and shimmieing, and acting the pleasant lady. I'm as good a man as the best of them. Yes, I'm a business man, too, for I once worked for one of the biggest bond houses on Broad Street, and—"

"But, Eddie, I might want to borrow some money."

"You, borrow money!"

"Yes, indeed. Mr. Murgatroyd's affairs are so mixed up. I suppose everything will be all right soon—but, oh my, I'm such a poor business person, and there's always something new turning up."

"Tell me all about it?"

"Well, this morning a Mr. Montgomery Ratner telephoned me about some very valuable stocks that he was holding on my husband's option. He claims to be an old friend of my husband, and has been looking for me ever since the funeral. He says he ought to have two thousand dollars this week before he can turn over the stock to me. He says the stock may soon be worth fifty thousand, and he hates to see me sacrifice it. But I haven't the two thousand and don't know where I can get it. A woman can't

borrow from her friends like a man can."

Like a flash, her army of friends, those whom he knew, filed past him in his mind, including Van Pelt, and he agreed with her that it wouldn't be wise to borrow from friends.

"But you could borrow from me. I'm different. Isn't that so?" he asked.

She permitted him to hold her rose-tipped fingers, and when he noticed the grateful, upturned flash of her eye, it touched a long-forgotten chord in his heart. Yes, he could love her, even though she was possessed of great wealth.

"I'll get it for you," he promised.

"Oh, no, you musn't," she murmured, slipping her fingers out of his hot palms, and from out of the corner of an eye, Eddie saw Van Pelt entering the dining room.

"I'll get it for you all right; you simply must let me," he begged. "Now come and 'phone this Montgomery Ratner that you will send Ed Fillaner to see him to-morrow."

He led her away, past the watchful eyes of old Van Pelt, into the telephone booth, and listened while she delivered the message, at the same time reviewing in his mind his army of feminine admirers, so as to select the most likely one from whom to borrow the two thousand.

MR. MONTGOMERY RATNER was truly an artist, else why such understanding of the principle of contrast in selecting the noisy, bustling region of Broad Street as a location for his office. What could be more tranquil, more secretive than the confines of his little cubicle up on the twenty-sixth floor, rear side, of the Exchange building? Surrounded by all the agencies of information available, docketed, cabineted and filed, he had reduced the activities of business life to a waiting game.

He waited for Eddie Fillaner long after the hands of his little gilt clock had passed the hour of appointment, but most of his clients needed a little extra courtesy, for they always paid well for it.

When Eddie did arrive, he surprised Mr. Ratner by refusing to sit down.

"Oh, very well, sir, if you are in a hurry. So you represent the widow of my old friend, Jack Murgatroyd, eh? Would you mind showing me your credentials?"

Eddie smiled, and slowly lit a cigarette, then he moved slowly over to the side of Ratner and tapped him familiarly on the shoulder. "Aw, cut out that 'old friend Jack' stuff. Say, I know who you are all right. Your specialty is milking widows—selling 'em oil and mining stocks that ain't worth the paper they're printed on. Say, all that you know about Mrs. Murgatroyd is what you saw in her husband's obituary notice. I'm on to you. She looked like juicy pickings, didn't she, eh? But there's nothing doing, my friend — hear me, nothing doing."

"Why—on the principle that you saw her first?" queried Mr. Ratner, in his soft, inoffensive voice.

"Spin it out—what're you getting at?" snarled Eddie, surprised.

"Why, my friend, I know as much about you as you profess to know about me—perhaps more. Don't you remember old Mrs. Theobald and her missing check book? Why didn't she cause your arrest for signing her name? Surely you didn't threaten to jeopardize her reputation? What about Miss Kelly who borrowed some of her father's money just at a time when you most wanted money? I thought it strange that Mrs. Murgatroyd would send you to me. And what about Mrs. —"

"Enough, I say—cheese it!"

"But, my friend, you asked for it. I have it all here in these papers on my desk. Remember, those who live in glass—"

"Say, what's your game?"

"I can tell you at once. I want two thousand dollars from Mrs. Murgatroyd

for some mining stock her husband should have bought from me before he died."

"Did he say he would have bought it? Have you a letter?"

"My, but you are thick. You can take my word for it that he would have bought, if I could only have seen him."

"If you could only have seen him! Some scenario, believe me."

"Good enough."

"Say, you fooled yourself this time. She hasn't any money. Didn't she ask me for two thousand last night."

"What! Old Murgatroyd certainly had plenty of money. Oh, I suppose his will hasn't been probated yet."

"Sure, it's something like that."

"Sit down, Fillaner, and let's talk things over," suggested Montgomery Ratner. Then he slowly lit a cigar and after a few tentative puffs he settled back in his cushioned chair in an attitude of thought. He sat thus for fully three minutes, while Eddie watched every changing line of his face.

"Listen," Ratner finally said, straightening up, "I'll go with you now to Long Beach, and you must introduce me to Mrs. Murgatroyd. You see, she alone knows the exact state of her late husband's affairs, and I'm the boy who can pump her. Then we will decide just how to get something. It's fifty-fifty—what do you say? And, by the way, there's a certain girl I want you to help me find."

They reached Long Beach just before dinner, and immediately inquired at the hotel desk for Mrs. Murgatroyd. But she happened to be out. Ratner insisted on a stroll up the board-walk, with the possibility of meeting his fair enchantress of his last visit uppermost in his mind. He was sure that Eddie Fillaner was likely to know her, and could make more regular the approaches to acquaintanceship.

Not more than a hundred yards away from the hotel entrance, he recognized her—seated in a wheel chair with a man who appeared to be more than sixty years old, and his attitude toward her was most affectionate. Ratner looked at them with astonishment.

"That's she," he said excitedly.

"Gee, then it seems that you know her!"

"Well, not by name. She's the girl I'm in search of. As I told you before—"

"Shucks, man—it's Mrs. Murgatroyd."

"Mrs. Murgatroyd! And who's that man with her—Van Pelt?"

"Yeh, Van Pelt, the millionaire grocer."

"Well—if that don't beat—say, come over here."

"No, they'll see us. What're you going to spring on me now?"

"Come away, I say. The game is up. Say, I saw that woman cutting an item out of a newspaper in the library last time I was here. And do you know what it was? I found out afterward in New York. It was the obituary notice of old Van Pelt's wife. She's getting a line on him—see?"

Eddie Fillaner was beyond speech, as he remembered how she had used him to make Van Pelt's acquaintance.

"And now I know," Montgomery Ratner continued, "that Murgatroyd left her nothing. It is very difficult to figure on those mining fellows. But retired grocers—say, she'll make no mistake this time."

"I get you, Ratner, but—"

"But nothing," returned the other, "I tell you it's no use. No man can beat that game."

Those who gave their lives get no bonus.—*Columbia Record.*

THEIR PIECE OF ART

By LOUIS SCHNEIDER

HIS is the last day of the year and, until a late hour last night, I was as much in the dark as the rest of the world regarding the disappearances of both Mark Bredon and Andrew Furbush, although I was quite familiar with all the incidents leading up to them, and although, as I now know, the disappearances took place almost under my very eyes.

It is now more than seven months since Furbush, who was the last to go, dropped from human sight. Bredon, as is well known, was last seen almost eight weeks before. We were at that time at work on the first pier of the Kellmouth bridge, which colossal structure, so masterfully planned and expeditiously finished, I am content to have stand as a fitting and lasting monument not only to their ability as engineers, but to the men themselves, although it was I who, in the main, put the work through. But the Kellmouth bridge, in the finishing of which I took such pride after they had disappeared, I shall never again willingly or knowingly cross.

I had been with Furbush & Bredon nearly thirty years when the problem of constructing the Kellmouth bridge was broached to us. I had risen steadily in their employ until I had attained the position of general superintendent. So, as may be evident, I knew the men well, even intimately. I neither overestimate their ability as engineers, nor condone their failings. That there were bickerings and quarrels between the two is no secret; but it must be granted by all that where action was essential or paramount, their method of attacking the problem in hand was efficiency itself. The stories about them, which this disclosure of mine will renew, will be enough evidence on the one point, and their works will be the only corroborative voice required on the other.

The mechanical minds of the two worked together as smoothly, certainly, and perfectly, as the parts of a marvellous machine. Men of their positive qualities and temperaments could not work together long without friction, any more than a machine can, but in their case the friction possessed a certain dynamic quality. Many a man among their competitors can vouch for the fact that they took contracts at what were judged to be ruinous figures, quarrelled incessantly as to details of buying and construction, and yet never lost money on a project. Indeed, they scarcely ever failed to win bonuses offered for work finished in less than contract time.

I had heard strange stories of how the two had come to strike hands in the engineering field after having acquired a not uncertain standing by their individual endeavors, but in spite of these current tales and the friction that existed between them, their activities promised to go on until the far-held Reaper should dissolve the partnership. So matters stood when a crushing blow fell upon Furbush.

The keen mechanical perception of the man was not impaired, but the moral side of him seemed to suffer a corroding attack when his wife and three children were lost in the tragic sinking of the Orthovic in mid-Atlantic. He had ever

been a brusque, sharp man, and matters came to such a pass after the tragedy that, when the pressure of their business did not imperatively demand their presence, Bredon and Furbush grew into the habit of keeping away from the work for weeks at a time.

So things stood when the promoters of the Kellmouth project came to us with their problem. I spent a strenuous pair of days in locating Bredon and Furbush, both of whom, unfortunately, were away and not easily found. Both—Furbush, particularly—held an attitude of scant sufferance of the other's presence until I placed the matter of the bridge before them, which, as may well be believed, I speedily did. At once their animosities disappeared in the heat of constructive creation.

The bridge is the greatest in the world, —the deepest foundations, the heaviest piers, the longest spans, the boldest design. As the structure grew in their minds, detail by detail, so it stands today —substantially. Nights were almost as days with them as long as the plans lacked anything of being a perfect whole. Their capacity for going without rest, sleep, and meals, was almost unbelievable. My protests and cautions as to a less nerve-racking pace went unheeded. If I were to say that they threw themselves into the work it would appear to be, in the light of subsequent events, a deliberate and inexcusable play upon words. Let it be enough to say that the immediate effect of their exhaustive efforts was that as soon as the plans were finished to the minutest details, and the inevitable reaction set in, they seemed more bitter toward each other than before.

Both had the common good sense to virtually drop out of sight, though they kept in touch with the actual work through me.

As indicating a common peculiarity of the two I may say that in the providing of the enormous quantities of materials required in the construction work they often ordered me to do things which, had I been left to proceed alone, I should never have done. Where it was possible, and by any margin financially safe, they had always contracted with old friends for materials when they knew that those friends were in need of business, even though they might have been able to purchase materials of an identical quality at a lower figure elsewhere. It was at this point in their relations that the dangerous situation developed.

We sunk the huge caisson on the right bank of the Kell through the quicksand to bedrock in record time, with an occasional visit from either Bredon or Furbush. Never since the beginning of the work had they met. Bredon came quietly and went quietly. Though he was a man of strong and sturdy build, he was on the order of a gray ghost of whose coming and going we were scarcely aware. Furbush came less often but, though a silent mood was now on him, his presence made itself felt like a fall in temperature. The grim set of the jaw under his closely cropped gray beard and the narrowness of the pupils of his blood-shot eyes were disquieting. To see him stalking about with his great shoulders hunched forward and his hands gripped hard behind him, one wouldn't care to incur his enmity.

Then, with the caisson finally cleared of sand, and the work of filling it with concrete well begun, they met. It was early morning. Bredon had come into the camp the previous evening and had stayed the night with me. He and I had risen when the camp was barely astir, and stood on the scaffolding at the caisson's edge, peering into its huge well which soon would be filled with the artificial stone which the derricks that loomed about us would lower and place quietly in the seepage at its bottom.

"Will Wastrow, do you think, be able to deliver the cement as quickly as we need it, in addition to keeping up with his

other orders?" I asked of Bredon. Wastrow was the man who had the contract for the furnishing of the cement.

Bredon nodded. "He has never failed us," was his reply.

"Considering that he's getting two cents a barrel above the closest price, and the amounts these holes will swallow, you may be sure he'll do it," bit a voice at our heels.

It was Furbush. He had come up behind us in the dawn without being heard. His hands were laced at his back, and his shoulders and jaw had a more bellicose thrust than ever. His eyes were fixed on Bredon.

"Andrew," said I, to the point, and striving to keep him from pursuing the matter farther, as was my wont when matters came to such a pass as this, "though you left it to the two of us to decide whether we should use Wastrow's cement, you gave me to understand, plainly, that you would not look unfavorably on the awarding of the contract to your old friend even though his figure was somewhat in advance of the other bids."

He ignored me completely. "Since when have we become a philanthropic institution for the relief of broken-down hangers-on?" he demanded of Bredon.

"I'll make good your share of the difference, if you are not satisfied," said the other quietly.

"And if it's rotten cement?" gritted Furbush. "How are you going to make good my loss of prestige if this, the biggest bridge engineering feat of all times, goes to pieces, eh?"

"Every shipment has stood the most rigid tests, and has come out with a big margin to spare," I put in.

"Oh, it might make a vault that would hold him in, dead or alive," sneered Furbush, "but as for this purpose—"

"I believe," offered Bredon, in a level voice, but it was evident that he found it hard to hold himself in, "I believe that in all that we have ever done together I have been able to hold up my end of it, Andrew. Should I, do you think, fail at this late day—even if I were solely responsible for the work?"

"Held up your end of it, did you—even to this?" Furbush whipped out as he stepped forward a pace and thrust a gnarled fist before Bredon's face. "Do you remember how, thirty odd years ago, that fist taught you enough respect for me to make you come into the business with me, Mark Bredon? And do you think it now lacks the power to renew that respect?"

"It was'nt your fist," Bredon gave back boldly, "it was your ability. In spite of the words that have passed between us, time has proved the soundness of my judgment of those days, which told me that, however much we might differ on some things, we needed each other to reach the top in our field. I weighed your brain; damn your fist!"

Furbush threw back his head and an ugly, jeering laugh came from his bearded throat. What else they might have said, or exactly what followed, I do not know. A cry rose from out in the camp just then and I turned. A tongue of crackling flame played along the side of one of the laborer's little houses. Calling for Furbush and Bredon to follow, I ran for the nearest ladder.

When the blaze had been extinguished I did not for a time think of Furbush or Bredon. But when the morning meal was ready, I remembered and went to look for them. At first I did not think to look upon the scaffolding, but when I did I saw Furbush walking up and down near where I had left them. I called to him, but he did not seem to hear. Finally I went up.

"Where is Mark?" I asked.

He unclasped his hands from behind him and threw them out in a stiff, forced gesture. He seemed sobered and a bit dazed.

"Time for breakfast," I reminded him.

He continued his pacing for a time.

"This time it is he who is gone," he said.

"Gone? Who?"

"Mark. I have—" his voice quavered and broke— "I have done him—done him an irreparable injury."

"You have learned much in your life," I flared, "but you have never learned to curb your tongue."

"My tongue!" He brought his right hand again in front of him and fixed a strange look upon it, the look one would fix upon a loathsome snake or a deadly weapon. I saw then that the knuckles were broken and bleeding. "Twice in our lives I used them on him. The first time I—I thought I won him with them. And now—and now—"

I could find nothing to say and, after a moment, without a look at me, he walked to the ladder, made his way down, and so out of camp.

We did not see him again for nearly a month. By that time we had filled the caisson to far above the level of the first scaffolding and were building quickly toward the cap. He had little to say. To walk close about the pier—to lean with a hand against its huge, cold, curved side seemed to be sufficient.

"When will you be down with the caisson on the other bank, and begin filling?" was the only question he asked me.

I told him what my estimate was, and that we were gaining on our contract time.

"Yes, I know you," he replied. "That means that you will win a day or two between now and then."

"We may," I smiled.

He nodded. "I will watch," he said, in a low, slow voice.

"Have you heard from Mark?" I asked.

He did not even trouble to shake his head. I might have known, for I knew Mark Bredon.

"This—this is our last job together," he whispered presently, leaning heavily against the pier. "We'll never work together again on anything less than this—our greatest achievement. I'd rather have that said of me, John, than that we had broken and done anything smaller because of the break."

I tried to cheer him by saying that since it had been proved that their immaterial differences could not be settled by recourse to physical force, they might resume relations on a truly lasting and amicable footing. I further declared that already I sensed a wonderful change in him.

"Do you? Do you know, I have been thinking of what he said that last morning. We seemed habitually to take opposite ends of everything that came up, but it was as he said: He was always able to hold up his end of whatever was put upon him." He gazed slowly upward and outward as though his mind's eye followed the spans of that huge structure which Bredon had helped design and forward. "I've been wondering lately if he wasn't always a bit ahead of me at that."

I looked into his wide eyes, now so changed from what they had been a few weeks before, and found myself unable to say anything.

"I have always been restless and impatient of tongue and arm," he continued, with a display of emotion which almost beat down the barrier of my unwilling, fear-bitten silence, to fling me into loosing a flood of protest against a menace of which I had no tangible evidence, "but you'll know the day when I shall hold up my end of our work as quietly and surely as he holds up his. Until then—until then—John Carnoby, good-bye!"

As once before, he strode to a ladder, descended, and so out of camp, walking slowly and more slowly, as though it were against his will to go. Yet he went, and I never saw him again.

He did not wholly disappear at the time. Reports came to me later that he had been seen at various places—always silent, solitary, brooding. I heard of him, too, through some of the clerks at our home offices, one of whom even said that

he had seen Furbush seated before my open desk. Of this latter I could then find no evidence. Finally no more was heard of him, although the last place where he was seen was not far from the mouth of Kell, at about the time when we were finishing the first pier.

Months passed. The pier on the left bank of Kell rose to the level of that on the right. The spans of the bridge proper crept steadily out to fasten their steel riveted grips upon each other. The bridge finally stood completed—the wonder of a world. And yet neither of the builders of Kellmouth bridge came near their creation, as far as any man had knowledge.

Others made search for Andrew Furbush and Mark Bredon, but not I. I knew that wherever they were there was still an unbreakable bond between them, and I felt that in good time I should have word of their whereabouts and state. And I was not mistaken.

Last night as I tore the next to the last leaf from the daily memorandum pad which lies on my desk, making ready for the last day of the year, a few lines of jerky writing on the final leaf caught my eye. I knew it instantly for that of Andrew Furbush.

I drew it to me and read:

"John Carnoby:

"Mark Bredon lies imbedded at about the five-foot level of the right pier of the Kellmouth Bridge. Poor devil!—it will be so heavy! so heavy! Can I do less than hold up the other end of it with him?"

The price of barrels having been raised 120 per cent., all hopes of being able to go around in one of them by and by, when one can't buy any more clothes, seem to be dashed.—*Boston Evening Transcript.*

To be a pirate bold was a life of freedom. A pirate did just as he pleased—until some other of his fellow pirates did just as they pleased. —*St. Louis Globe-Democrat.*

The Secretary of Labor says the country will have three years of plenty. If he means three years of what we have been having the country already has a plenty.—*Paterson Press-Guardian.*

THE CRIME OF MR. FIGG

By WEARE HOLBROOK

HENEVER I am hungry I may stop at Mr. Figg's for mutton pie. Whenever I am tired I may sleep in Mr. Figg's little spare room that opens on the garden. Whenever I am lonely I may talk and smoke with Mr. Figg. At least that is what Mr. Figg says.

He is not a philanthropist; neither is he to be my heir. But I have rendered him a small service, which he has chosen to magnify.

He is a marble-cutter, shriveled, indefinitely old. I suspect him of gradual ossification. He seems to have absorbed part of his product; the accumulating years have covered him with a monotonous patina of stone dust. His beardless face, his bald head, his hands, his clothes, all have a bloom that is anything but the bloom of youth. Even his blue eyes seem to have faded to their surroundings.

But there was never a kindlier man; and his daughter will gaze at him with adoring eyes and tell you that he is greater than Phidias.

It was when I was reading law in the office of Woodle and Wells that I first saw him. I was often sent out with collections, and occasionally these took me to the shop and stoneyard of Mr. Figg. I easily made his acquaintance, in spite of the fact that a collector is generally considered an unwelcome visitor. Perhaps it was because he was lonely; he has neighbors, but these, I understand, are inclined to tap their foreheads when they speak of him.

Often he takes me into the back room of his shop, where to this day are things one can find nowhere else in all the world—horrible things, for the most part. His daughter paints pictures which he frames and hangs on the walls, or did until the walls were completely covered with them. Now they are piled in the corners, almost under foot. Having always lived inland, she has a penchant for marine views—stormy, spinachy seas, and rock-bound coasts garnished with symmetrical sea gulls.

To go from the barren work-room, with its calm, gray blocks of stone, into this tiny, kaleidoscopic art gallery, is always a shock. Along the wall is a broad shelf covered with the pollen of the work-room. This shelf bears Mr. Figg's choicest *objects d'art*. There is a little horse in a latticed stable carved from one piece of wood by a sailor, an apparently perfect crystal from somewhere, a portrait of Bolivar done in porcupine quills, a leper's bell, and a sliver of bog-oak which Mr. Figg swears is part of the true Cross, and which he keeps in a lacquered box with Fuji painted on the cover. His taste as a connoisseur is catholic in the extreme.

One October morning I stepped quietly into his shop and found him bent over a sheet of drawing paper, employed at the melancholy task—as I learned later—of designing his own tombstone. My heel grated against a flake of granite on the floor, and he whirled about at the sound, his face preternaturally white.

"Oh—I'm glad it's you!" He rubbed the back of his hand across his damp forehead. "What do I owe for, now?"

"This is merely a social call," I as-

sured him. "But why did you jump so, when you heard me? You looked as if you had seen a ghost."

"Ghost!" he echoed, in a subdued tone. "Did you say 'ghost?' Tell me, sir, just what put you in mind of a ghost? I'm curious to know. Was it something about —this place?"

"Why, no," I laughed. "It simply happened to be the first thing I thought of. That's all."

"Yes, yes. Of course. But there be reasons for most things, if a body stops to figure. Now, tell me, what do you think it was, put you in the mind of ghosts?" and his face wrinkled in a momentary smile, intended to be cozening.

"Well," I answered quite promptly, "I guess it must have been yourself, Mr. Figg—the way you looked."

"Ah, I might have knowed it," he nodded sadly. "But I'm glad for your tellin' me."

"Why?" I asked. Certainly he was deeply moved about something.

"Do you know, young man," he pecked at my sleeve with a chalky finger, "I'm getting ha'nted?"

I laughed.

"My, I wisht I could laugh like that," sighed Mr. Figg, admiringly. "I daresay I haven't laughed for a fortnight. It's an awful feelin', and I expect it will get wuss and wuss. What would you do, sir, if there was to be an ungodly bangin' and clatterin' in your shop o' nights, and never a soul in sight? What would you say, now, if you was to find your toolbox toppled upside-down, and the lock 'most wrinched off, and never a thing else touched?"

I didn't know what to say.

"Well, that's what this—ghost does, night after night," he affirmed. "Neighbors is complainin', and I can't sleep for listenin' to noises all the time."

He looked more weazened and haggard than I have ever seen him, before or since. The shop is certainly an ideal place for ghosts, lined as it is with grim tablets, blank and "sacred to the memory of—"

"Mr. Figg," I said, "there is quite evidently something wrong. Now, I've had enough experience with ghosts to know that they're very reasonable individuals. A few of them may go about howling, with their heads lopped off, but they merely aren't sure what they want. The average ghost is quiet and determined; when he has accomplished his purpose he subsides and is heard of no more. So what we'll do is to stay here to-night and find out just what does happen, and why."

Mr. Figg was not enthusiastic.

"No, sir. It's bad business. I think I'm ha'nted on account o' something I done, but blest if I do recall what. No, sir, I believe I'll stay away, if you don't mind. Fact is, I've about decided to move out altogether. These parts been't healthy, though they do say once a body's ha'nted, land or sea makes no difference."

Now, Mr. Figg happened to be one of Martin Woodle's tenants, so it behooved me, in the interest of Woodle and Wells, as well as of Mr. Figg, to lay the ghost.

As Mr. Figg would not be persuaded to participate in the laying more than to give me his keys, I began my vigil alone, shortly before twelve, that night. Midnight being the witching hour, I decided that if nothing happened by one o'clock, I should give up and go home.

I brought with me a book of briefs, and settled down beside the lamp that stood on Mr. Figg's desk. But I had not turned half a dozen pages in my book before a gust of wind from nowhere at all whisked the lamp into blackness.

"This ghost," I thought, "is behaving in a truly proper manner." At first I could see nothing, but gradually, as my eyes became accustomed to the dark, I distinguished the interior of the shop by the vague moonlight that shone through the dusty windows. Everything was still; nothing had been disturbed. But my at-

tention was attracted after a moment to noise in the vicinity of Mr. Figg's tool-box which stood in a shadowed corner.

As I glanced in that direction I saw a gray figure bending over the box; when I looked more intently, it vanished. A second later I saw it again, but as soon as I looked directly at it, it was gone. Like those billious pin-wheels that so gaily foretell an attack of indigestion, it seemed always just outside the range of vision. But I found that by twisting my head about and staring out of the corner of my eye, I could keep it in sight.

It was a small, frosty figure of a man in an antiquated dress-suit. A shock of wild, white hair bobbed vigorously as he tugged at the cover of the box. For one of his size, he made a tremendous racket; he reminded me of a terrier with a bone.

Suddenly he sat down on the box and stared at me. From the front he looked more than ever like a terrier; he had scant eyebrows raised to a height of perpetual astonishment, and bristling side-whiskers. I felt uncomfortable; I wanted to speak, but my voice failed me.

"Your name isn't Figg?" he barked. It was more an accusation than a question.

"No."

"No, of course not," he agreed. "Psychic Research?"

"Well, not exactly," I replied. "I'm here to find out the reason for all this racket, if there is any. What's the matter?"

"Matter? Matter enough!" he kicked the box savagely. "The matter is that this box won't open."

"But why such excitement over this box?" I objected. "There's nothing in it but a few tools."

"That's it exactly! Nothing but a few tools. Judging by the way old Figg has bolted and locked it, one would think it contained the wealth of Midas. I know there are tools in it; I can reach in and feel them, but I can't get 'em out. It's exasperating!"

And to show just how exasperating it was, he thumped his shadowy fist on the cover and flamed with rage. His form grew fairly radiant, and the heat that he generated was so scorching that I feared for my eyebrows.

"If I keep this up," he shouted hopefully, "the bolts will eventually run out of their sockets!"

The air in the shop was painful. Desperately I reached for the keys and threw them at him. They were so hot that they had burnt my fingers.

"Ah, this is better. Now, I know you're not Psychical Research—you're too sensible," he chuckled, as he fitted the smaller key into the padlock. "I thank you, and I'm sure Mr. Figg does, too."

The atmosphere cooled rapidly. Without the slightest hesitation he took a chisel and a mallet from the box, and locked it again. Then, bowing grandly, he handed me the keys and glided away with the much-desired tools.

He walked through the solid door as if it had been so much steam. The mallet and chisel, however, struck violently against the oaken panels and clattered to the floor.

The ghost came back, muttering.

"I might have known I couldn't get them through," he exclaimed pettishly, as he picked them up. "I'll have to trouble you for the door key."

I felt that it was time to interfere.

"Those tools belong to Mr. Figg," I said bravely. "Before I let them go, I want to know who you are and what you intend to do."

To tell the truth, I had fears for the safety of Mr. Figg himself. Such an excitable shade might do dastardly deeds with a chisel and a mallet.

"Well," said the ghost, considerably mollified, "I am the late Dr. Constantine Blessing, of Dowe College."

"The author of Blessing's Greek Grammar?"

"The same," he nodded proudly. "You

have perhaps read my obituary in 'The Academy'?

"My wife hired this stone-hacker, Figg, to carve a quotation from Pindar on my monument. Well, sir, do you know what that fool did?" He fairly flickered with anger. *"He left the accent off the very first word!* Think of it—disregarding Pindar entirely—no more respect for Pindar than for the man in the moon! Can I rest with a thing like that over my head? Can I have future generations blaming Blessing for the mistake of Figg? I cannot. I am going to put that accent on with my own hands. Unlock the door for me"—he became suddenly humble—"unlock the door, and I promise—never to come back here again."

There was a note of ineffable sadness in the old man's misty voice, and I felt that the least I could do was to unlock the door.

On the threshold he turned and held out his hand.

"Thank you," he said earnestly.

I reached for the hand, but my fingers closed on thin air, and I saw the chisel glint in the moonlight as he darted down the street. That was the last of Dr. Constantine Blessing.

Leaving the key in the door, I went home. It must have been a week before I had occasion to call on Mr. Figg again. When I did, he was hard at work; he had a shining, new chisel in his hand, and a worried look on his face.

"Well, Mr. Figg," I said, "what's on your mind?"

"Mind?" he cried anxiously. "Now, how did you come to think o' my mind, I wonder? Do you know, sir, I believe my mind is failin' me? I do. I put things in a place and then I disremember where the place is. See this chisel—brand-new chisel—and the mallet yonder? Both bought this week, sir. Can't find my old ones high nor low. Most likely they're in this very room, but God only knows where. It's worryin' to forget that way."

"But how's the ghost?"

"The ghost!" he laughed. "Hasn't been sight nor sound of any ghost since the night you watched up. You scared him away, sir, blest if you didn't. I feel better; I don't feel ha'nted."

He reflected a moment.

"I did have a touch o' the feelin' the other night, comin' from Nicholas Opper's birthday party," he confided. "I went over the hill past the cemetery, and there, mind you, I heard a big bullfrog goin' 'plink—plink—plink,' loud and steady-like—'plink—plink—plink.' Now, never did I hear one in the cemetery before. A bullfrog on a big, dry hill been't natural, that's all. No, sir!"

TRIANGULAR FINANCE

By A. L. CRABB

DOGGONIT all, why couldn't that boat excursion be next week instead of this?" inquired John Brown, editor of the Crater, the monthly exponent of the student body of Hilltop, as he walked rapidly away from the bulletin board. "Just announced, and for Saturday, too! Four days! Now, can you beat that! Oh, doggonit all!"

You can see plainly that the worry germ was nibbling merrily away at John's vitals. He had five dollars, but he wanted ten. Let him explain why as he addresses the bricks of the sidewalk.

"Who'd have thought about that excursion being this week! I would have that money from home by next. I wonder if there ever was a boy at Hilltop who failed to take his girl on the annual boat excursion. I'd just like to know that, I would! Five dollars to take Mary Layman on the excursion with! Five dollars! Now, wouldn't that jar your grandma's blackberry jam! I suppose it could be done, but who wants to be a miserly tightwad, anyhow! Who wants to take a girl like Mary to the wharf in a crowded old street car when a taxi isn't half good enough for her! Who'd like to say: 'Mary, look at the nice chewing gum I've brought!' Yessir, that'd be about my size with five dollars! And, if the street car should break down, I suppose I'd say: 'Don't mind it, Mary; it isn't but two miles to the wharf, and we can walk; we need the exercise, anyway.' Five dollars! I'll have ten if I have to sell my vote, rob a bank and ditch a train to get it!"

Upon natural deliberation, Brown adopted a plan which steered clear of criminal devices. He chose the ancient expedient of making a "touch," a method that doubtless was old when the patriarchs were young.

He knew that the money market at Hilltop, while usually tense, tightened with a jerk at the approach of the boat excursion. He was fully conscious that the successful engineering of his plan demanded finesse of a fine quality. After some mental balloting, he elected Cicero Lutes, alias Hot Air, as his victim. Then, he thought deeply in terms of finance.

Hot Air Lutes, captain of the Hilltop baseball team, and would-be orator, sat in his room immersed in an ardent perusal of "Gems of the World's Oratory." Hot Air was a tiptop baseball player, but hopeless as an orator, but like many another, he estimated his talents in the reverse order. There was a rap upon the door, and John Brown entered the room. Somewhat bewildered by the high honor of being visited by an editor, a senior, and a personage of renown all rolled into one, Lutes slipped on his shoes, kicked some soiled linen under the bed, and bade his visitor sit.

"Hot Air," said the Personage, "I came to talk with you about that speech you made on 'Temperance,' the other night before the Neocomian Society."

"Yes," said Mr. Lutes, filled with throbs.

"I am right, am I not, in assuming that you composed that speech yourself?"

"Every word—"

"I thought so. It was a great speech. How many words does it contain?"

"Eleven hundred and seventy-six, but what—"

"Approximately twelve hundred. About four columns, I should say."

"'Four columns,'" murmured Lutes, a great hope taking form in his mind.

"I shall be perfectly frank with you, Hot Air. That speech was too valuable a contribution to oratorical annals to be lost. I have come to ask you for the manuscript so that if possible I may run it in the Crater."

If an angel, driving in a chariot of fire, had stopped at that moment and asked Hot Air if he would like to ride up, he would have replied:

"No, thank you; drive on, please."

"If I decide to use it," continued the editor, "I shall want the copy by next Monday, at the latest. Or, couldn't you let me have it by Saturday? I could go over it then, and get it ready for the printer by Monday."

"Yes, sure, but, look-a-here, Saturday's the boat excursion."

"Oh, I know it," replied Brown, several coats of deep gloom appearing on his face. "I know it well enough, but I cannot go, cannot go."

"Is your work that fierce?" asked Lutes, wondering.

"I shall be frank with you, Hot Air, perfectly frank"—a dramatic pause—"it isn't the work. I simply haven't the money. I shall get some next week, but now I'm broke, that's all. The subject is painful, Hot Air; let us dismiss it. Is that speech in typewritten form?"

Hot Air's shoulders sagged under a great responsibility. "But, Brown, I—"

"We will not discuss the matter further. Disappointments come to us all; I can bear mine," affirmed the editor, bravely; "now, about that speech—"

Again Hot Air ignored the subject, however dear. "Brown, I'd just be glad to lend you that money."

"I thank you, Hot Air, but I couldn't think of presuming that far. Twelve hundred words; now, let me see—"

"But, Brown, as a favor to me, let me stake you for that trip."

"If you put it that way, but, no, I—"

"I insist," insisted Hot Air. "There isn't any friend of mine going to miss that excursion if I can help it. Will a five-spot take you?"

"Ordinarily, I should refuse to accept a penny, but from you only, Hot Air, I will accept five—no more."

"Glad to do it. I'll hand it to you later."

As the editor passed down the steps, he winked to himself and said:

"Now, am I not the human-nature expert? Still, the flesh is pretty weak, particularly Hot Air. I'll play safe by not taking the matter up with Mary until I hear that five a-rustling in my pocket. He ought to cough up sometime tomorrow."

We will now leave Editor Brown for awhile, and observe the deliberations and operations of Hot Air Lutes, captain of the Hilltop baseball team, and would-be orator. When the editor of the Crater had departed, Mr. Lutes sat for some time adjusting his faculties to late developments. Then he addressed the furniture:

"Well, I guess I'd better be up and doing, as the poet says. Me, lending a helping hand to a bankrupt brother, the boat excursion on, and the sum of $4.60 in my jeans. Shucks, Brown isn't so stuck up after you once know him. Now, wasn't it lucky he came to see me? It would be a low-down shame if he couldn't go on the excursion because he didn't have the money and was too proud to borrer. I bet he will want my picture to go with that speech. Well, since I'm in the relief fund business, I'd better be showing some signs of activity. Now, I wonder how Dude Sweeney is heeled with spondoolix. What do you know about Slick Lay being called home yesterday? That sure looks goods to me." The tender, dreamy look of springtime came into Hot Air's eyes, and he continued:

"Yes, sir; and if I raise that five for Brown, I'm going to take Mary Layman on that excursion with that little four-sixty of mine. She is a good sport. She's got sense. She knows that a fellow that hasn't got a good profession yet can't blow himself much on a girl. Well, on your way, Hot Air, on your way. The early worm catches the bird, as the saying goes."

Jefferson Sweeney, alias Dude, stopped in answer to a hail from behind. While waiting, he flicked a film of dust from his shoes and adjusted his tie. Sweeney's actions were, in main, motivated by two instincts and one idea. His instincts were: to preserve an immaculate exterior, and indulge in theatricals at every opportunity; and his idea was in the form of a burning ambition to play on the Hilltop baseball team.

"Howdydo, Sweeney," said Mr. Hot Air Lutes, falling into step beside him, "that was some swell practice you put up with the scrubs yesterday."

"Why, were you there?" asked the flattered Mr. Sweeney. "I didn't see you."

"Oh, yes," cheerfully lied Lutes. "It's my business to scout around. You see, the team is all the time needing new material." A sudden resolve seemed to strike Hot Air: "I shall be perfectly frank with you, Dude. Slick Lay had to leave yesterday, and second base has to be plugged up. I've been thinking, since I saw you in action, that I'd ask Coach Craig to give you a chance at the place."

Compared with the thrills Sweeney was experiencing, the thrills of requited love would have to be hunted for with a seismograph.

"Oh, Mr. Lutes—" he murmured.

"Yes, I think we'll give you a chance, and if you show the goods, it's Slick Lay's uniform for yours. Could you come out Saturday and practice with me?"

"Why, yes, sure; but, why, Saturday's the boat excursion."

"So it is, Sweeney; so it is. But the boat excursion is nothing to me, nothing at all to me. I'll not deceive you, Sweeney; I'll be perfectly frank with you. I invested in a set of orations last week and it left me high and dry. If I had known that the excursion would be this week I wouldn't have bought it. I have some money coming in next week. Of course, you are going on the excursion, Sweeney. Excuse me for mentioning practice for Saturday. I'd forgotten for the moment. Could you come out for practice on Monday?"

Sweeney was on the verge of renouncing the excursion, but a happier thought occurred to him.

"You don't care for the excursion, Mr. Lutes?"

"Care for it! Why, Sweeney, I'd rather lose my eye teeth than miss it. But let it pass. I shall pay for my extravagance alone, and in silence."

"You won't do anything of the kind," announced Sweeney with sudden and strong determination. "You are going on that excursion if I have to pawn my jewels to get the cash."

"Thanks, old man; but I couldn't think of troubling you—"

"Trouble! It would trouble me if you should refuse to accept it. I'll slip you a V to-night at supper."

"Since you put it that way, I'll accept it gratefully. I shall depend on you for practice Monday."

As Hot Air walked away he winked complacently to himself. In fact, so pleased was he with the trend of things that he continued winking at brief intervals until he reached the boarding establishment of Ma Reynolds, where roomed Miss Mary Layman. Ma answered the ring.

"Want to see me?" asked Ma.

"Why, no," said Hot Air "I'd like to see Miss Layman, that is, if you're willing," he added, making concession to the militant air which Ma always manifested in the presence of strange young men.

"I'm willing," said Ma, grimly. "I'll see if she is."

Miss Layman, at that moment, was receiving Miss Dollie Gabbert in her room.

"I just dropped in," explained Miss Gabbert, "to talk about the excursion."

"Isn't it fine?" asked Miss Layman.

"Just lovely. Do you know that Elbow Thomas wrote me a note in chapel and asked me to go with him? Don't you think he's awfully forward?"

"I don't think he ought to write notes in chapel," observed Mary, critically.

"I don't either—to other girls. You're going with John Brown, aren't you, Mary?"

Mary flushed painfully. "There hasn't been anything said about it."

"Well, if that snail doesn't arrive pretty soon, somebody else will."

Mary's flush deepened. "No, they won't, either," she stated positively.

"I do hope," said Dollie, with splendid indifference to tact, "that John will ask you. I want you to go so much."

"I don't think I'll go. I've got to work."

"Gentlum t'see Miss Layman," announced Ma from the door.

"It's John," said Dollie, joyfully. "These old slow-pokes do finally get there. Run on down to see him, dear. I've got to go now."

Even a poor observer would have noted the disappointment that was portrayed on Mary's face when she beheld her visitor.

"Why, hello, Miss Layman. I thought I'd drop around to see how you were."

"Did some one tell you I was sick?" inquired Mary.

"Sure not. You're the very picture of good health. That's something everybody ought to have, too, good health."

"If you'd make a doctor, maybe they would," suggested Mary.

"I may. I'm thinking something about it. I kinda believe I could do better in politics, though."

Miss Layman considered the statement. "It's fine weather," she said finally. Hot Air heartily sanctioned Miss Layman's meteorological observations.

"You couldn't beat it, and it is getting finer all the time."

"Did you want to see me about something, Mr. Lutes?"

"Yes," said Lutes, "I want you to go on the boat excursion with me."

This was lightning from an unexpected quarter. "Oh, no; I don't think, I guess—"

Hot Air jumped at conclusions. "Oh, I see. You've got a date. Now, isn't that fierce?"

Miss Layman chose to let his assumption stand. "You musn't fail to go, though, Mr. Lutes."

"Oh, I'll go, all right; but I wish I'd have seen you first. Well, so long, I got to hit the sidewalk, now."

"I half-way believe that was a narrow escape," mused Hot Air, as he left. "It wouldn't surprise me any if she's a high-flyer. I don't believe four-sixty would make much of a hit with her."

When Lutes had made his touch and departed en route to Ma Reynolds's, Dude Sweeney assembled small items of change from various parts of his person. These, he audited:

"Four-fifteen," he announced. "By my troth, if I can but raise a quintet of bones for Lutes, Mary Layman will fix my lunch for the excursion. Aha," he continued, speaking to the limestone veneer of the walk, "if I'm any sort of prognosticator of signs, Editor Brown is about due to cough up."

Brown was in the editorial sanctum that afternoon wrestling with a poem turned in for publication by Miss Pansy McClure of the sophomore class. The poem opened thus:

And now, the birds, and beasts and flowers
Are doing all within their powers.

The further developments of the poem were such as to require Brown to do all

within his powers if the poem were to merit space in the columns of the Crater. The job seemed hopeless, and he welcomed the tap on his door as a relief. Mr. Jefferson Sweeney, alias Dude, entered.

"How doth the busy little bee?" inquired Mr. Sweeney somewhat airily as he located his hat and cane upon proper hooks.

"I'm devoting my time and talents to the fine art of making bad poetry worse," sighed the editor. "How goes it with you, Sweeney?"

"Quiet, quiet, me lord; but there'll be something stirring anon. There's a switch brewing in the line-up."

"Do these spells come often, Sweeney? The general line of your conversation indicates an overworked mind."

"What we shall see that shall we behold. Meanwhile, let us hearken unto facts. Every morning, in my native hamlet, when the householders open their front doors, they see a morning paper lying out on the grass. Sometimes they go out and pick it up and read it. The star reporter of that sheet, to wit, the Mayfield Blade, will hike for unknown parts next July. It's a dandy job; a cool fifty per, and a fine old place to live in. A certain father of mine, with whom I am influential somewhat, is owner of the Blade. Newspaper work is, I understand, the dream of ye editor. Do you gather the drift of my discussion?"

Brown's power of self-repression forced some struggling emotions back under cover. "Only vaguely," he said; "but I'll admit that the subject seems very much like one that interests me."

"Sure, it interests you, all right. Here is the matter in a nutshell. First, the job exists. Second, the most promising eligible who has swooped down upon my field of vision is the renowned editor of the Crater. Third, my opinion as heir and assignee of the boss ought to have some influence. Would you like the job?"

"Does Rockefeller like cash?" asked Brown, feeling that his implied simile was weak and colorless.

"Good!" exclaimed Sweeney. "I shall write to the pater about you Saturday."

"Not Saturday, Sweeney. You'll be going on the excursion then."

"Shut up, can't you! I can't hear anything, it seems, but that old boat excursion. Every fellow I meet lines out a chant about it." Here Sweeney negotiated an artistic change of tone and countenance. "No, I'm not going on the excursion. I can't go; but I'll beguile the lonely hours away by writing to father about you, Brown."

"But, Sweeney, why—"

"I shall tell him that you are clean, vigorous, optimistic. Those are the things that he is strong for. And, Brown, I want you to come up to my room Saturday evening when you get back, and tell me all about the excursion. That will brighten things up for me a bit."

"Why aren't you—"

"Because I haven't the money," broke in Sweeney. "You are a friend of mine, Brown, and I shall be frank with you, perfectly frank. I blew me to a guitar last week, and my paternal stipend isn't due until next. Now, if excursions were worth a cent a thousand I couldn't buy the ink to print a single ticket. A guitar is a regular vampire, a siren, a bloodsucker," he continued, developing righteous indignation, "and this one has drained my heart's blood and left me a-gasping."

It is said that the mind of a drowning man covers a vast deal of territory. There are, to be sure, other conditions which encourage nimbleness of the mental faculties. While Sweeney was relating his tale of woe, Brown's mind was very active. The ambition of a lifetime seemed in a fair way of being realized. Boat excursions were transient, fleeting, sweet experiences that lasted but for a day, then gone forever. But to live in the columns of the Mayfield Blade, to

infuse one's ideals and personality into his constituency, to chase a flying pencil across reams of paper, to make and unmake, that were far better. Years later he would tell Mary of the excursion which he had sacrificed. "Dear John," she would say, "you did exactly as I would have you do." Having renounced the excursion, he took a five-dollar bill from his pocket.

"Here, you siren devastated mariner. Take this and go on that excursion. Suppose you write your father to-night."

Fifteen minutes later, as Dude Sweeney passed down the stairs leading from the editorial chamber, he winked with evident self-satisfaction in the general direction of Mr. Dude Sweeney. Presently, he found himself occupying a seat on Ma Reynolds's front porch, Ma having been dispatched to summon Miss Layman. Mary's heart fluttered, and love's young dream dwelt in her eyes as she came down the stairs. At last, John had come to arrange for the excursion. She would prepare a luncheon for the excursion that would be a revelation to John. She knew what he liked. Once, in her presence, he had remarked that in point of desirability among edibles chicken salad led all the rest, and she had treasured the saying in her mind. John should feast on chicken salad to a satiety on the excursion. "Let's see: shred finely the flesh of two boiled fowls, add chopped celery—"

"Ah, maiden fair, good afternoon," said Mr. Dude Sweeney.

"Oh, all right," answered Miss Layman, dully.

"How flit the fleeting hours with you?" asked Dude.

"Did you want to see me?" she asked.

"Even thus. The excursion comes on apace. I would for your companee."

"Oh, Mr. Sweeney, I don't think—I guess—no—"

"I see. I witness. I comprehend. That being the case, I'll hie me away. Congratulate the lucky chap for me."

"The excursion only announced for this morning," communed Dude with himself as he walked rapidly toward town, "and this claim staked already. Believe me, but these are forward days. Maybe, it were better so. Four-fifteen. Embarrassments might arise. Let others take what course they will, but give me freedom, absolute freedom on excursion day. Still, I'm glad I asked her. It makes 'em feel good to be asked."

Miss Dollie Gabbert was not one to sit idly by pending the adjustment of any matter in which she felt an interest. At eleven, Tuesday, she again visited Miss Layman in her room.

"Has that speed demon showed up yet?" she asked.

"Has what?"

"Why, John; has he come around to see you about the excursion yet?"

"I haven't seen him. I couldn't go, anyway. I'm not up with my work. He might have come when I was out."

"Work nothing! I wonder now if he's too stingy to go."

"Of course he isn't. He must have come when I was down town yesterday. I couldn't go, anyway."

"I think," said Dollie, "that I'll go around and see John myself, and find out what's the matter with him."

"If you do I'll never speak to you again." Mary spoke sharply, and the tears showed in her eyes.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, honey. I wasn't a-meaning to meddle."

"I know you weren't," said the repentent Mary. "I reckon I'm just nervous."

"I do hope it will come out all right. I must go now."

"Wait a minute, and I'll walk as far as the drug store with you."

"Good morning, ladies," said John Brown, encountering them at the crossing.

"Here is where I depart for parts unknown," said Miss Gabbert, turning promptly down Main Street.

John fell into step beside Mary, and they walked along in silence, both self-conscious and painfully ill at ease.

"How are you?" asked John lamely.

"Quite well, thank you," responded Mary coldly.

John wondered vaguely why Hot Air had not contributed the five he had promised. If he had that five he would ask Mary to accompany him on the boat excursion. Mary was a sensible girl. She wouldn't expect to go in state. He could make out splendidly on five if Hot Air would only come across.

Shorty Cooper, strolling down the street, passed them. Both were so abstracted as to permit Shorty to pass unnoticed. Shorty's democratic soul rebelled at such treatment.

"Hey, you," he called. They stopped and faced about.

"I just wanted to say," said Shorty, "that I just bought me the smoothest little kodak over at Hilltop, this morning, and I want to use it on you two on the excursion. Sorter try it out, you see."

"Why—" said John.

"I can't," said Mary.

"Yes, sir," Shorty went on, "if that picture-taking machine of mine won't take you right, you're just not right, that's all. Say, you-all going, aren't you?" An awkward pause ensued. Shorty eyed them narrowly. "'Cause if you don't go, you'll miss—"

John's vertebræ stiffened. "Sure, we're going," he said.

"John!" exclaimed Mary.

"We're going," he reiterated. "You catch that first street car Saturday morning, Shorty; we'll be on that, and we'll look that kodak over then."

Shorty went on down the street.

"John!" exclaimed Mary.

"Yes, Mary," lied John, "I had just started over to see you about it. It's all right, isn't it?"

"I wasn't expecting to go much," replied Mary feebly, "I'm not up with my work."

"Work, nothing! You get ready for that excursion."

"If you want me to go that much, John, why, all right."

"Oh, Brown," called a voice from a window of a house which they were passing. They paused, and presently Hot Air Lutes issued from the front door.

"Hello, Miss Layman," greeted Hot Air. "Hello, Brown. I just wanted to shake hands with you. Place it here, old man."

Somewhat puzzled, Brown extended his hand. When Hot Air withdrew his a five-dollar bill remained. Brown nodded his gratitude.

Hot Air stood watching the retreating figures.

"I wonder now," he said softly to himself, "I wonder—" He broke off, shrugging his shoulders, took a manuscript headed TEMPERANCE out of his pocket, and lovingly fingered its pages.

At the same time, Mary was saying to herself:

"Shred finely the flesh of two small fowls, add chopped celery, and—"

ZEKE

By HORACE J. SIMPSON

LOVE came to Zeke suddenly, strangely, like a blow, on his thirty-second birthday. It made its unheralded, petrifying appearance in the blaze of an August afternoon. At a quarter past three—that was the exact moment when Zeke's amatory instinct awakened and made him rush up and kiss Sophie-Lizzie, on Perseverance Wharf, which is at Wisby Waterless.

You won't find Wisby Waterless on the map, in the railway guides or topographic directories. Those austere public mentors refuse to take cognizance of the compound form. That is a playful antiphrasis, the origin of which is obscure. It may have been in the ireful brain of a local wit whose house had been flooded by the tides which breach the sea walls without fail each winter.

But Wisby—just Wisby—you'll find that printed in the smallest possible type on the map at the head of the muddiest creek in the county of Essex. It's where the Wisby Yellow bricks come from.

And Zeke—Ezekiel Aggis—Zeke was mate of the Jeptha and James, the most decrepit unit of the decrepit fleet of sailing barges owned by the company which burnt the Wisby Yellows—a speechless dolt with a ludicrous grin, butt for the heavy wit of all the bargemen and brickmakers at Wisby Waterless.

Ten years he had sailed with Jerry Broad, the most artful skipper in the Wisby fleet. None but Jerry would have kept him ten days. The secret came out now and then when Jerry bragged over his pint at the Plough and Sail.

"Zeke'll work when yew ain't looking," Jerry would say, when other skippers jollied him. "I kin enjoy myself ashore all day when he's doin' ut. An' he won't grouse when I come back; he ain't got sense enough. Zeke never opens his mouth 'cept to put a bit o' grub in ut."

That was Zeke.

And Sophie-Lizzie—Sophie Elizabeth Bunt—was maid-of-all work at the Plough and Sail which faced Perseverance Wharf, whereat were loaded into the company's barges the Wisby Yellows aforesaid.

Blunt-nosed, snappy-eyed, dumpy-figured Sophie-Lizzie; household drudge all day—her badge of servitude a dab of grimy lace that forever seemed to cling perilously at the back of her head—at night she washed her face, discarded the dab of lace, planted a bush of red ribbon in her thick hair instead, and odorous of yellow soap, served pints over the bar.

Serving bargees and brickmakers with pints had worked wonders with Sophie-Lizzie. Before she was allowed to do that she would scuttle like a rabbit at the approach of a man. Now she no longer flushed, stammered and dropped mugs in pitiable confusion if a customer bantered and leaned too far over the bar. She could flirt indiscriminately, believing her washed face and red ribbon irresistible.

This, then, was the Sophie-Lizzie who slipped out from the back door of the Plough and Sail, dab of lace and all, shortly after three in the blaze of an August afternoon, and called to Zeke, working like a slave, as Jerry Broad

bragged he did—sitting cross-legged on the hatches, pushing a needle through and through a tattered sail with a palm.

"Zeke!" she called down to him from Perseverance Wharf. "Zeke, I've just popped over to wish yew many happy returns of yewr birthday."

That should have surprised Zeke, should have warned him to be on his guard against the wiles of Sophie-Lizzie. She had never troubled to remember his birthday before.

But Zeke was neither surprised nor warned. He was not affected in any way—then. He didn't even trouble to look up until he had finished pushing his needle through an obstinate seam with the sailmaker's palm.

Then he took time to wipe the sweat from his eyes with the back of his hand, and by almost imperceptible degrees Sophie-Lizzie became aware that she could see less and less of the top of Zeke's tar-stained cap and more and more of his stubby face and interminable grin.

So she waited, albeit impatiently, for some acknowledgment of her designing good wishes.

But what issued at length from Zeke's slow mouth was no acknowledgment such as she expected. The dolt looked at Sophie-Lizzie, then aloft as if to take stock of the old barge's standing gear, then back again to Sophie-Lizzie.

"Ut's luvverly weather," he said. And then, bright after-thought, "for the time of the year," he added.

Sophie-Lizzie's snappy eyes snapped faster.

"An' so ut should be, you great stewpid!" she flared. "Ain't ut yewr birthday?"

Zeke lifted the sail-needle and scratched at the back of his ear.

"Is ut?" he said.

"Is ut? Why, of course, ut is! Yew was thirty-tew at ha' past one this mornin'."

His grin smoothed out a little. He stared at Sophie-Lizzie as if she had been a sibyl who for a shilling had revealed the darkest spot in his secret history. His mouth hung open.

Sophie-Lizzie explained the source of her omniscience.

"I know ut," she said, "'cause yewr mother and mine uster laugh an' say it was a race between she an' her. An' yewr mother won, Zeke. I wasn't born till a quarter to two."

Zeke's lips came closer together. The sail-needle explored down the back of his neck for an itching there.

"Well," he observed judicially, "they had luvverly weather for the time of the year."

Sophie-Lizzie seemed to pounce upon him as if she had been on the watch for him to lapse from the straight path. She giggled, sucked in her under-lip, turned up her eyes.

"Ze-e-eke! Ain't yew awful! Fancy joking about a solemn thing like that! Yew are fast!"

She giggled again. She shaded her face in her hands in a too-palpable effort to appear modestly shocked.

Zeke's eyes opened, he became aware that he had a heart, that Sophie-Lizzie's reproof was making it beat a shade faster. Falsely her giggle rang, like the spurious coin it was. But Zeke took it, the reproof that was so palpably flattery, the clumsy affectation of modesty shocked—what had he done to shock it?—took it greedily, proudly. Its false jingle made sweet, unaccustomed music for his dull ears.

Faster and faster his heart thumped. He had tingling sensations inside. Something had happened to him. Suddenly, without rehearsal, he had achieved the impossible thing—become as other men. A woman was hiding her face before him, had reproved him for being fast. He was coming on!

Sophie-Lizzie lowered her shading hand a little; peeped over it. Their eyes met. There was something in Sophie-Lizzie's that Zeke had never seen in a

woman's before. There was something subtly sweet in her voice, too.

"Zeke," she said, "yew do surprise me! I never thought you was fast like other men. Yew never come to the Plough and Sail."

He didn't. He put his poor shillings of spare cash in the savings bank instead.

"But after that, after sayin' a thing like that, I shouldn't be surprised if yew was a rare one for the women after all." Sophie-Lizzie sighed. "Oh, yew men!"

She regarded him archly, with ogling invitation. Zeke's heart was thumping madly now. His poor wits reeled, intoxicated by the miracle that was working in him. More than ever he was a man among men. He was fast, he was a rare one for the women! A woman herself had said it; Sophie-Lizzie standing up there on Perseverance Wharf, with a waist to be squeezed, a mouth to be kissed.

He stood staring up at her with glowing eyes, his form stiff like a ramrod, his cheeks burning. Warm, wonderful sensations ran about him like corrosive liquid. The native spark which is in every masculine heart had been fanned suddenly, vigorously. The gilded nimbus of man's prime instinct encircled his tousled head.

For some moments he stood thus, incapable of speech, of movement.

And then, such was the mesmeric power of Sophie-Lizzie's ogling eyes, that all fear, all doubt of himself took unto itself wings. That silly shyness in the presence of women that had always been a salient feature of his doltishness, dropped from him like a suddenly-loosed garment.

There was Sophie-Lizzie, with her voluptuous waist, her full, panting breasts, her large red lips—desirable—attainable!

In a moment Zeke was clambering up the piles of the wharf. Mad, blind, like a charging bull, he rushed at her, caught her. His arm, python-like, crushed her loose waist. He kissed her, full on her large lips, with a loud smacking noise—furiously, impudently, with all the assurance of the confirmed libertine.

She struggled. His onslaught made her gasp for breath. She lifted her big red hand, spread it over his mouth, and pushed his face back with all her strength.

"What yew doin'?" she panted. "What—what d'yew mean by ut—kissin' me? I ain't yewr gal."

Zeke fell back like a drunken man reeling from the policeman's push. His head hung sheepishly. The gilded nimbus dissolved. The sensations inside him went cold, leaving him numb. His grin seemed to freeze on his face. His expression was ghastly.

He had kissed a woman. He had done an incredible, nightmarish thing. He stared pitiably about him, as if seeking a hole to rush down and hide in, away from the awful consequences of his momentary madness.

But such speechless, paralyzing terror was only a shadow, only a passing shadow, obscuring the sun for a moment and chilling the world. Sophie-Lizzie laughed. Laughed!

And Zeke heard her. It sounded thin, far-off, like a voice across the water. His scattered wits came back slowly. He raised his face and looked at Sophie-Lizzie with insensate cautiousness out of the corner of one eye. Their glances met. For a moment or so every nerve in his being stretched taut with suspense, racking him poignantly. And then the cruel tension relaxed. Sophie-Lizzie laughed again, tittered inanely, with mock prudery in her snappy eyes.

"Zeke," she said. "Ain't yew awful!"

Zeke breathed again—took in a deep draught of air like an army recruit expanding his chest for the doctor's approval, exhaled it like the sigh of a tired horse.

"I dunno," he said. "Am I?"

"Yes, yew are! You fair took my breath away. Yew made me forgit what I come for."

She seemed to be trying hard to recollect, passing her red hand over her mouth and snapping her eyes at a rapid rate.

Zeke's face brightened with marvelous sagacity.

"I know," he said. "You come 'cause ut's my birthday."

But the slight negative sign which Sophie-Lizzie made with her head indicated that Zeke's sagacious inspiration had grievously misled him.

"Somethin' else as well," muttered Sophie-Lizzie. "Ut was—"

She paused, seeming to scan every detail of his doltish physiognomy. Her own face wore a composite expression in which caution and desperation seemed to be quarrelling, with rude coquetry looking on.

"Zeke," she resumed suddenly, her voice meant to be honey-flavored, "ut was to ask yew somethin' what I wouldn't ask anybody else in the world."

She edged closer, making play with her eyes. And Zeke, dolt as he was, could not mistake the signs. They invited him to squeeze her loose waist again if he so minded, they assured him that he might take his fill of her lips with no risk of having a hand clapped over his mouth.

The sensations like corrosive liquid heated him again. The gilded nimbus blazed about his head, but the emotions which thrilled his dull soul now were tempered by a nightmarish recollection that held the predatory instinct reined hard, like a horse ridden on a curb.

Sophie-Lizzie's eyes snapped her opinion of such a slow dolt. Her body stiffened. There was a silent, tense period of calculating immobility; and then desperation prevailed in the struggle on her features, overthrew caution with such a crash that onlooking coquetry fled.

"Zeke," she said. "I come over to ask yew to lend me five pound."

The murder was out. Her good wishes for his birthday revealed themselves impudently as mere scouts in enemy country. She brought up her main forces now and attacked with one overwhelming rush.

Zeke stared at her with a stupid, wondering gaze. Her assault wavered. She shrugged her shoulders, and giggled doubtfully.

"I know ut's a lot o' money," she admitted. "I wouldn't ha' asked yew—only—"

Something new and strange in Zeke's face stopped her; something that seemed to take his doltish features, his ludicrous grin, in magic hands and remodel them with one swift, deft movement; something that changed, transfigured him. She felt curiously as if she had just seen a mother lug a dirty, howling child in at the back door and set it out again on the front step with a clean pinafore and a washed face.

But before she could analyze definitely the thing she saw, Zeke took a step to the edge of the wharf and clambered back to the deck of the Jeptha and James.

"Zeke!" she cried. "Where yew goin'? Yew ain't—yew ain't answered my question yet."

He grinned, but otherwise took no heed of her. She saw his awkward figure shambling aft, watched it back down the cabin ladder, sinking from view in jerks until all she could see of him was the top of his tar-stained cap. And then that, too, disappeared, and Sophie-Lizzie was left alone, utterly incapable of deciding the significance of Zeke's abrupt going.

He might mean to lend her the sum she brazenly asked for, or he might not. It was hardly worth while worrying about. She had thrown her loaded die; if it tumbled perversely the fault was not hers.

Somewhat in this wise argued Sophie-Lizzie, until Zeke's tar-stained cap reappeared above the companion-hatch. And in an instant she saw that her die

had fallen obediently on its weighted side! She could not see the money in his hand. She didn't need to. What she saw on his face was enough. She was no fool. Serving pints at the Plough and Sail, bantering brickies and bargees —setting them back in their places too, when they deserved it—was an experience that had sharpened her wits.

With eyes that snapped fast, and looked everywhere but at Zeke, she waited until he had clambered back onto the wharf beside her.

"Here, Sophie-Lizzie!" she heard him say suddenly. "Here ut is!"

She held out her hand, her eyes gloating, her smile rapacious.

"Ut's—ut's a lot of money, Zeke," she murmured, as if virtuously protesting.

He laughed joyously. He was elate. Her need was his opportunity. If Jerry Broad, or anyone else in the world, had asked him for the loan of a mere shilling, he would have hesitated, almost certainly he would have refused. Like most fools, Zeke hoarded and hugged his money.

"No," he said with proud emphasis, "ut ain't a lot o' money! I got double that down there in the cabin. An' I got over fifty pound in th' bank."

Sophie-Lizzie feigned a sort of surprise, but it was stale news to her. Not for nothing had she listened to Jerry Broad's talk over his beer.

"My!" she said. "Fancy that now."

He sidled nearer. His voice became low, quavering.

"Sophie-Lizzie," he said. "I'd do any thing for yew, I would."

She backed away. For one moment something that flashed from his eyes lighted up her puny soul, discovered her contemptible meanness, as lightning at night reveals the inscrutable mystery of the sleeping earth.

She turned from him suddenly and ran. If she had stayed another moment Zeke's five pounds would have been flung at his feet. The money seemed to have turned white-hot in her hands, flaying the flesh from her fingers. She ran away.

Zeke made no attempt to follow her. His wits were too slow-moving. He stood staring the way she had gone. He didn't get angry. He knew no emotion save a vaguely-sweet something that was slowly flooding his soul; something different in degree from that first mad exhilaration, softer, more subtly refreshing. In comparison it was like purified, rain-washed air after a thunderstorm.

That was a little after quarter past three in the afternoon.

At six, or thereabouts, Jerry Broad returned to the Jeptha and James.

He was amazed. Zeke, the patient slave, was not working! He had changed his tar-smeared workaday gear for a shore-going rig that Jerry had not seen him wear more than half a dozen times in ten years. He had cleaned his boots, washed his face, shaved his stubby chin, oiled his hair.

"Goo' Lor'!" said Jerry. "Where yew hikin' off to?—got up in that clobber like a barber's clerk o' Wednesday afternoons!"

Zeke faced his taskmaster with newborn audacity.

"I kin go ashore if I like," he said. "I'm goin' to the Plough and Sail. I'm goin' to see Sophie-Lizzie."

"Eh?" said Jerry. "Yew don't drink beer! I ain't never knowed yew to!"

"No," said grinning Zeke, "an' yew never will. I like lemon squash better'n beer."

"An' you ain't never bin one to go hangin' about after th' women!" argued Jerry.

Whereat Zeke stiffened proudly.

"I turned over a new leaf," he said. "I've kissed Sophie-Lizzie, I have! I kissed her up there on th' wharf this afternoon!"

Jerry stared wildly—stared until a paroxysm seized him, racked him with hilarious convulsions.

"Yew—yew great jack-ass! Yew nacheral-born imbecile! Yew've gorn an' done ut—you have! Darky Spitty'll do yew in—sure's yew'r the biggest fool in Waterless!"

"Eh?" said wondering Zeke. "Darky Spitty?"

"Ay, Darky Spitty! D'yew think he'll stand yew' hanky-pankying about with Sophie-Lizzie? Don't yew fret! Him an' her's gittin' married. The job comes off Sunday morning."

Zeke staggered. He clutched at the tiller-head with feeble fingers, held on there, the blood draining from his features till he looked like a ghastly image in chalk.

"Darky Spitty!" he gulped. "Him marrying her? Why, he ain't got th' money to git married on! He—he spends it all at th' Plough and Sail!"

Jerry shrugged his heavy shoulders.

"He's borried some," he said. "Leastways, Sophie-Lizzie's borried ut for him. Wheedled five pounds out of some poor fool. I heard ut out o' Darky's own mouth just now. Five pound—that'll pay th' parson and buy th' beer. They've took a furnished room with old Mother Jarvis."

He paused, looking at Zeke, gloating over the discomfiture of the poor fool, and then went on, every word a stab at Zeke's lacerated soul.

"If yew've been kissing Sophie-Lizzie," he said, "I wouldn't like to stand in your shoes. Yew know what Darky is! Yew'd best go an' git a weddin' present, and give ut to her before she tells him."

Zeke half turned then. He faced Jerry Broad with a look in his eyes like a sheep's mute, pitiable appeal under the butcher's knife.

"I done ut," he said faintly. "I give her a weddin' present."

"Ho!" Jerry chuckled sceptically. "What'd yew give? A five-pound note?"

"No," said Zeke. "I give five sovereigns. An' I'd give ut again! I'd give ten—to Sophie-Lizzie!"

He let go the tiller-head, dashed from it like a greyhound from the slips, pushed Jerry aside without ceremony, and started clambering down the companion-ladder.

"Here!" shouted Jerry affronted. "Where the devil yew shovin' to? What yew doin', yew fool!"

The answer came from the depths of the cabin.

"I don't like these dam' shore-goin' duds!" said Zeke. "They hurt me! I'm a-goin' to take 'em off!"

GOOD NEWS

By JEAN MAHAN PLANK

HE puzzled frown with which Chauncey Perry had been slowly typing an item on the machine in his little private office disappeared as he gleefully abandoned the task at a welcome announcement by Billy, the office boy.

"A young lady, Mr. Perry—from the Collegiate Bureau."

Chauncey's inexperience with office help could not have been more definitely shown than by his prompt supposition that the first applicant to arrive had come to go to work.

"Ask the young lady to come in here, Billy."

The cherubic physique of Billy was presently displaced by a hesitating figure in the doorway. Chauncey, with whom gentle manners had become instinctive by way of ten years of Latin tutoring in a private school, stepped cheerfully forward to greet the young woman, held a chair until she was safely—and somewhat surprisedly—seated, then placed himself with his back to a big Renaissance mahogany desk with brand-new, shining appointments, and faced the applicant with a smiling bow.

"Can you go to work right away?" he asked politely. "You see—"

"Now?" An astonished flush darted over the thin, pale face of the girl. "Why, you haven't seen my references, nor—"

"Oh, quite true—I beg pardon! Let me—" He looked helplessly about for his memoranda. He had been told three questions he must put to applicants. Failing to find the written slip, he stumbled upon the first query.

"Where have you worked, Miss—"

"Stanley—Mary Stanley," she told him.

"Oh, thank you, Miss Stanley!"

"I have some letters, but — not — from—" She colored slightly as she arose and handed him the papers. Chauncey sprang to his feet to receive them.

He read the letters absently while he tried to think of the second question. It popped in, opportunely, and out.

"How long since you left your last position? Is one of these letters—"

"No, Mr. Perry." The girl's voice trembled. She was seated upon the edge of her chair. "I've been out of work for three months—and ill. There is no letter from the last position." The voice sank into a frightened silence.

Chauncey, with his face full of inquiring sympathy, adjusted his eye-glasses and looked for the first time directly at the girl. His comment, however, was mental.

"By Jove! She looks hungry." He saw faint blue lines under the dark gray eyes, noticed the thinness of the sloping shoulders. "I wonder—"

This wonder had the fortunate effect of helping him to propound the third question.

"What salary do you have, Miss Stanley?"

The questioning gray eyes turned upon him with a hunted, terrified look. They searched his face.

"I would start with—almost anything, Mr. Perry, if you would try me. Would —ten dollars a week be too—"

This modest suggestion suddenly reminded Chauncey that he wanted Miss Stanley's services in a double capacity. After adjusting the salary matter in a way that made the applicant move further back in her chair with a look half puzzled, half relieved, he proceeded to expound to her the policy of this enterprise.

"Our paper, Miss Stanley, is to be published fortnightly—the "Fortnightly Good News," as we are calling it. Now, that name may puzzle you. You see, I—er—we, I mean, have had a strong conviction that the world would be better if papers, instead of thrusting before its eyes morning and evening every sin and folly known to mankind, would take the same trouble to find out the good things, the—not only, you know, the big, extraordinary things, like a huge bequest to a university, or a public library presented to a village, but the tiny accumulations of good that make up the solid sum of human virtue." Chauncey stopped to smile benignantly through his glasses at the pale faced girl.

Miss Stanley was staring at him. "But—would that be—news?" she ventured in her timid, trembling voice. "You see," she explained, "I worked a bit at journalism, but—"

"News?" Chauncey was aroused. "Is it news to me—to you?" He snatched up the morning journal. "'Policeman shot by brother-in-law, dead.' 'Man sued by wife, hiding, she says.' 'Man murdered in Clark Street.' 'Woman drugged, found in alley.' Is this news? No! It is news when we hear—as I heard yesterday—that a frail, once beautiful woman has for ten years supported a husband who is a drug fiend, and does it with a joy and quivering delight that a pampered society woman could not even imagine. She canvasses for books. And it is news that an expressman in Woodlawn saves every cent he can spare through the week, even abandoning his pipe, in order to buy beautiful flowers to take on Sunday to his wife in the insane asylum."

Miss Stanley again ventured: "But—will they—like it?"

"Like it?" Chauncey frowned. "Why, didn't you like to hear those things?"

"I mean the people reported about—"

"Oh, I see. Why, I think that a man—or woman either"—he bowed in deference to Miss Stanley's sex—"who wouldn't be willing and glad to sacrifice his own private feeling in order to uplift and cheer the world, and give it a glimpse of real goodness—real selflessness, is at heart not selfless, but is narrow, non-altruistic."

As Miss Stanley did not venture further, Chauncey outlined to her the double duty.

"For the present, Miss Stanley, I shall ask you to be my stenographer as well as to manage a department. Please find out, for your department only, as I have two reporters, such acts as I have indicated, done by persons of your own age and walk in life. With an enthusiastic gesture Chauncey stepped to a filing cabinet to get some papers to show his newly acquired assistant. As he closed the case, he brushed from his extremely well built sleeve an atom of dust, and pulled his white cuffs a trifle further over his wrists. When he turned about, Miss Stanley's face had softened from its strained expression, and she was biting her lip.

A month of work was to be done before the Fortnightly Good News should become a fact in its initial number. After the first two hours of her occupation, Miss Stanley entered a protest. Chauncey had come in with a tiny, gray, down-and-out kitten, and was seated before his desk watching the little animal absorb the contents of a pint bottle of milk, which the editor of Good News emptied by spoonfuls into his stamp moistener. Miss Stanley had arisen to go to the files, but she suddenly stood still and looked deprecatingly at her chief.

"Mr. Perry," she said in an amused tone, "will you please not arise every time I get out of my chair?"

Chauncey, astounded, stood gazing at her and rubbing the kitten's fur the wrong way.

"You see, Mr. Perry, we'll never get ready for the first issue if you do that. I've postponed writing three letters for an hour because I wanted the blanks and didn't like to make you get up."

Chauncey dropped into his chair with a short laugh. "Very well, Miss Stanley." He stroked the kitten's rapidly plumping sides and murmured abstractedly: "I think I'll call her Nuntia Bona."

As the business of publication began to focus and everyone concerned was wearing a harassed look, Miss Stanley handed her copy for her department to Chauncey for approval.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "That's fine. Nobody but one who knows those girls could have got at those items. Wonderful! Now—only one suggestion—I think it would be effective if you would have always the heading, 'Kindest Act of the Fortnight,' or something of the sort, and put it about the middle of your column. Don't you think so?"

Miss Stanley agreed with enthusiasm and the work went merrily forward.

When Chauncey was alone one day, his cousin, Abel Perry, stuck his head inside the office door.

"Hello, Chaunce!" said Abel. "Got rid of it all yet?"

Chauncey grinned. "You make yourself scarce, young fellow, or you'll meet the same fate your namesake did some centuries ago."

"Well, you see I'm interested. I have a wager up on you. Bartley bet you'd be able to give Aunt Jane's legacy away inside of a month, and I bet it would take two months. Please hold on to a few hundreds so I shall win."

Chauncey's face sobered. "Perhaps I am an enthusiast rather than a business man—"

Abel roared, but he came up to his cousin and put his arm around his shoulders.

"Enthusiast! Lucky for me that you were one when I was needing funds for my last year in college! But, Chaunce—" Abel drew up a chair. His face became serious. "Honestly, we all hoped that now you'd make life easier for yourself with that five thousand. You could keep on with your tutoring, but take a three months' vacation every summer instead of coaching that juvenile team in football all through the hot weeks in order to send somebody else on a vacation!"

Chauncey laughed. "The football coaching wasn't bad. It means that I can lick anybody who doesn't happen to like the Fortnightly Good News—beginning with you, Abel."

"Well, I know all that, but—why, you could go to Japan—the Bahamas—or—"

Chauncey squared his shoulders. "The Good News will let me do that, too," he said jocularly.

Abel could not conceal his disgust. Chauncey continued:

"I know how you all feel about it, and it means more to me than any of you imagine. Failure is a bitter pill to swallow. If this project fails, I—" Chauncey turned to his desk and extended a hand that was not entirely steady as he laid it on the silken fur of Nuntia Bona. The kitten, now making its toilet among his papers, had responded quickly to soft living, and wore, with the air of a born aristocrat, the blue satin ribbon Miss Stanley had tied about its neck. It curled with playful fierceness about its master's hand.

Abel took his cousin's other hand. "There's every reason why you should succeed, Chaunce, but why not take something that can be made to go—something there's a call for—something the world needs?"

This was pouring oil on peaceful fires. Chauncey faced him indignantly.

"The world needs! Why, on the morning that I decided upon this adventure, the little mathematics teacher in our school read the newspaper at breakfast and suddenly burst out crying—saying that it was horrible—no good in all the world—nothing but a pit of tragedy—it was hell—she believed we were in hell. She left the table. The next morning before breakfast, she threw herself from the third story window."

Abel was silent. Chauncey caught his breath and struck his fist upon the desk. "If a paper like this can't succeed, if the people don't want to know of the good, only the bad, then it is hell that we are living in."

Abel shook his cousin's shoulders without a word, and left the office.

The Fortnightly Good News, in a simple but attractive gown, had hardly appeared in the mail boxes and on the news stands of Woodlawn before the office telephones began to get busy. The first voice was that of an irate capitalist.

"Is this the editor of that Good News paper? This is C. C. Barnard. What do you mean by dragging my name before the public in this way? Who was that guy that wrote me up like that? I'd like to break his neck. Telling everybody that—that—"

"Why, Mr. Barnard!" Chauncey's surprise was not assumed. "It couldn't be possible that you would object to having people know that your great and wonderful success had come about through prayer!—and that you acknowledge the Power that has given you your great wealth."

"Well, well! but what d'you think people will say about my talking about it? Why, I'll be the laughing stock of Woodlawn. Oh, confound—"

"Why, Mr. —"

"Now, never mind! You cut that out. If you ever mention my name again in your little two-for-a-cent sheet, I'll prosecute—oh, such damn foolish—" Click! The offended Croesus had shut off.

Chauncey had no time to stand paralyzed before the telephone, for it rang again. The woman with the doping husband was hysterical. They were disgraced. It was cruel—cruel.

"I'll correct it," cried Chauncey desperately, "in the next issue."

"Correct it! You can't correct those things afterward. You have no business to drag private parties into such publicity."

The expressman who so poetically cared for his crazy wife was inconsolable because "de gang" would guy him. Being a person of active habits, he invited the editor of Good News to come out in the alley and he'd show him.

"Well, I could lick you," responded Chauncey quietly, "but I wouldn't. If I come out, I'll let you lick me. Any man who is true and faithful under such conditions as those can wipe the floor with me if he wants to."

"Aw—well—mebbe you didn't mean no harm, only de gang—"

Twenty-seven in all there were before luncheon time. At a quarter of twelve Chauncey dropped into his chair and rubbed his hands over his neatly cropped head.

"It's me for tutoring the rest of my life," he sighed. "Glad there'll be a bit left to help—"

His eye fell upon the bright, fresh copy of Good News that Miss Stanley had laid on top of his papers. The editor had been too much occupied to give it more than a hurried perusal. He unfolded it now, but without the fine glow that he had anticipated upon seeing his own paper in print.

Nuntia Bona, dreaming sweet, milk-fed dreams in her master's manuscript basket, was presently startled into a humped, bristling little ball of fur by his sudden violence of action. Chauncey sprang to his feet, and uttered a word that didn't sound familiar to Nuntia Bona. He adjusted his eye-glasses, and read the item again.

KINDEST ACT OF THE FORTNIGHT

Over a month ago, the editor of Fortnightly Good News engaged a stenographer. He saw that she was penniless—hungry—not strong. He employed her at a salary double the amount she asked. He at once drew a check for a month in advance and handed it to her.

During that month, the editor has worked side by side with that stenographer. He has never once invited her to go to luncheon with him. He has never asked her if she was fond of the theatre. He has never told her that she did her hair beautifully.

Taking these facts together, the conductor of this column considers that they constitute the kindest act she has known.

Chauncey rang with vigorous repetitions a bell attached to his desk.

"Billy, where is Miss Stanley?"

"Out here, writin' at her desk."

"Ask her to step here."

Billy's scared face vanished. Miss Stanley, calm, attentive, with a slight suggestion of roses in her cheeks, appeared.

"Miss Stanley,"—Chauncey was grasping Good News with both hands—"how could you? What on earth— Why, you've made me the laughing stock of Woodlawn—in my own paper!"

The stenographer elevated her eyebrows. "Why, Mr. Perry! You told me to put under that heading the kindest act of the fortnight, and you said that anyone should be willing and glad to sacrifice private feelings to uplift and cheer the world. And, Mr. Perry"—the calmness showed signs of breaking—"that was the very kindest act I ever knew. Mr. Perry—that was the reason I left my last place—the reason there was no letter of recommendation for me. It made me ill—the worry of it all—and I—"

Chauncey dropped the paper and gazed at his assistant while she made this rather vague explanation.

"Miss Stanley, you must have come up against some awful hard things."

"They were not easy, Mr. Perry."

Her face worked. Chauncey thought for an instant she was trying to keep from laughing. But suddenly she broke out crying and left the room.

He stood motionless for a minute. Then he swore—an oath somewhat stronger, yet quite as harmless, as the "by seint Loy" of Chaucer's prioress. Into the midst of the soft cursing, however, he suddenly broke with the inapropos remark:

"She does do her hair beautifully."

When Chauncey returned from luncheon that day, Miss Stanley followed him into the sanctum.

"Here is a bunch of letters just come, Mr. Perry. Shall I help you open them?"

Chauncey laughed somewhat bitterly. "I think I'm braced for the next onslaught. You cut the envelopes, please, and I'll wade in."

The reading did not proceed far. Chauncey uttered an exclamation. As Miss Stanley looked up inquiringly, he exclaimed again:

"Look here—read that!" He handed her a letter.

Miss Stanley read:

"You have saved my life—and more than that.

"I have been for some years playing a losing game in my business. The end came last night. At ten o'clock this morning, I stood before the cracked mirror in a shabby lodging house and held a pistol to my temple. As I did so, my eye fell upon the paper that a chambermaid had just spread out on the bureau in place of a cover. Without my own volition, I am sure, I read the words of the interview with C. C. Barnard.

"Now, he made his money in the business that has undone me. I've envied and admired him ever since I've been in it. And when I realized that he was using prayer as his strongest asset, as a

working force, I dropped that pistol as if it were hot.

"Why, I was brought up on prayer, and have always respected it; but I didn't know that it could be used in that practical way. If Mr. Barnard can do that, and does not hesitate to acknowledge his use of that great Power, I can do it.

"I prayed right then and there, without stopping to get down on my knees, and with the strongest faith; why, I just knew that what I needed and wanted was mine! You may not believe this. It seems too miraculous to tell about; but I had not gone a block from that lodging house before I met a man I knew, and he wanted to buy some seemingly dead property of mine—for cash—to start a new business.

"Some day, I'll write to Mr. Barnard or tell him face to face what he has done for me. But you show him this. If everybody was as willing as he to spread good news around, the world would be a different place.

"Put me down for five subscriptions. Check enclosed. I have some friends who need your messages."

Miss Stanley made no comment, but handed her chief two more letters. Both referred to the dope fiend's brave but sensitive wife.

"Tell her to come to me," wrote a certain rich man, "if she's got books to sell, I'll put in a whole library."

"Send her to my office," wrote a celebrated physician, "I'll cure her husband. It's an expensive process, but it shall not cost her a cent."

Subscriptions were doubled—trebled. One manufacturer ordered twenty subscriptions to circulate among his employees.

The telephone broke in upon the letter reading. The booming voice of the belligerent expressman smote upon Chauncey's ears.

"Say, mister, wot d'yuh know 'bout dis here? De gang got on to de racket youse give me in de paper, and wot d'yuh tink dey's up and done? Dey gets togedder and orders a big bunch o' posies to send to my li'l woman. And wot kind does dem guyes order? Orchards—orchards!—de kind the President's wife always wears to get her picture taken in. Why, orchards is two bucks apiece! Now, wot d'yuh know—wot d'yuh—" The big voice had to recover itself sufficiently to add: "Say, Mister, if you're hankerin' for it, just put that good news in your paper along wid de rest."

When Chauncey turned toward his stenographer, he saw only the masses of dark hair above the slender white neck. Miss Stanley's face was hidden in her arms resting on the typing desk. Chauncey thought she was crying, but she simply moaned. He told her about the expressman, and she lifted her head and looked at him.

"Oh, Mr. Perry, don't—don't give it up! I'll stand by you, Mr. Perry. I'll work for the merest stipend—enough for food and a room; and I'll work at anything—any department. Why, Mr. Perry, I was saved, too. I had been having dreadful thoughts."

In the silence that followed, the little clock on Chauncey's desk palpitated with silvery vibrations. Nuntia Bona sprang upon her master's shoulder and purred softly against his ear.

Chauncey presently turned and looked long at Miss Stanley.

"I'll never give it up," he said solemnly, "never—Mary."

The second number of the Fortnightly Good News contained this short editorial:

"The best of all good news that has come into this office is that good is not new. Kindness is commoner than cruelty; generosity commoner than greed. Heroism is so abundant that it makes cowardice stand out as some rare and valuable jewel. Love is not only more overwhelmingly in evidence than hate,

but our atmosphere seems to teem with it. We are surrounded by it as we walk. It sweeps about us, holds us, protects us —when we don't fight it off.

"Our own investigations, and the ardent, enthusiastic labors of our staff compel us to accept the above as being absolutely true.

"It has been thought expedient not to give the names of the persons concerned in the items published, but the actual facts we will continue to give, and the names may be learned through this office by consent of the persons themselves. The Good News will not cease to be a vigorous and searching right hand to find out what all these wonderful left hands are doing."

This paragraph appeared under Corrections:

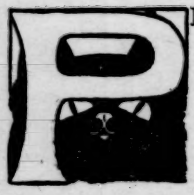
"The editor of Good News has been sadly maligned in his own sheet. We wish to correct the false impression.

"It was stated in our first issue that we worked for a month in company with our stenographer and never once invited her to luncheon, never asked if she was fond of the theater, never told her she did her hair beautifully.

"We want to state that in the fortnight just past, we have taken the stenographer in question out to luncheon twelve times, that we invited her twice to go to the theater (she has accepted both invitations), and we wish especially to affirm that she does her hair beautifully."

THE WEDDING BUSINESS

By ELWOOD BROWN



ERHAPS you have never heard of the time Judge Bender, the marrying justice, unknowingly put one over on Hawkins. The boomerang was thrown by Hawkins, but it missed Bender a mile and Hawkins got in front of the return trip.

We justices married couples for money, and the wedding business was quite a plum. While our salaries were pretty liberal, for we labored in a large city, we wanted as much of the luscious side line as possible. To get the business we employed solicitors, or "runners," on a commission basis, and they struggled nobly to bring in the bridal twains. The favorite stand of the runners was just outside the Marriage License Bureau, Cupid Carter's official quarter. When soon-to-be-married couples issued from the door, the runners would swoop down upon them and convoy them to the employing justice for the nuptial ceremony. It was a thrilling profession.

From the start Bender and Hawkins never hitched. Hawkins was an able chap, but peppery, and by nature abnormally jealous. In the hymeneal trade he ran a poor third for he had a miserable, bungling service; and a couple never recommended him to friends. Strangely, to himself, he blamed Bender—Bender, the matrimonial paragon.

Cutting in on the profits of our industry, though in but a small way, was a certain leech, a Reverend Burleigh Potter by name, a pussy-footed, fat-chested, sleek, roundish little whelp of a parson, who attracted business by parading back and forth, in the garb of his calling, where he could be seen from the License Bureau windows. His office was just across the street from the Court House. You know what he was after: the crumbs from the table.

Hawkins's business shrank and dwindled until in exasperation he arose one cloudy morning and fired his runner. This gentleman, a great hulking chap, Audrey Stevens by name, a former country preacher, took his dismissal with poor grace. Hawkins told him he was a rotten business getter, who picked the most miserable line of foreign trade. He concluded with the pointed observation: "The last six couples left exactly four dollars. Of this I get just fifty cents. None of them knew enough English to tell whether I was giving them ten years or life. And they thought it my duty to marry them. And worse. The last bridegroom could speak but three American words: 'Geev' me cigars,' he greased out. He thought I was the one to give presents. And his wife kissed me! Ugh! Do you call that profitable business? You are discharged!"

Hawkins didn't tell me Stevens's reply, but it leaked out. "What inducement is there for a couple to get married before you?" he shot out. "A salesman is no better than his line of goods. How can I deliver? Your crabby features, your mumbling, quick-to-get-a-bad-job-done service is only good enough for the cheap trade! Why don't you stick to law —you're smart enough at that—and let Bender do what nature qualified him to do? Good-bye!"

Runnerless, the remnant of Hawkins's wedding business raveled away to almost

nothing. And then, the first thing we knew, the disgruntled justice brought forth a plan to eliminate the runner system entirely.

"I don't like it!" he opened up in his aggressive way. "It isn't refined."

"You mean," returned Bender slyly, "the bridal pair won't walk into your parlor."

Hawkins was nettled, but kept himself in control. His next remark was a business gem. "Gentlemen, why take half when we can get all?"

That philosophy found me at home. You see, I wasn't doing so tremendously much better than Hawkins; my runner used to be a seller of soap and worked that in with his matrimonial soliciting. When he couldn't persuade a couple to eternal bliss, he tried to make them clean. I didn't like it."

"It sounds feasible to me," I supported. "We'll get practically as many weddings without the runners. We can pool our interests, lump the fees, and divide equally three ways."

Judge Bender frowned. The wedding business was his little gold mine, oil gusher and coupon bearer all in one. I know how he felt—that "why divvy with weak sisters" attitude. He was doing more than Hawkins and I combined. The marrying justice possessed a most pleasing little home, tastefully fitted up for evening weddings. He was a matrimonial artist, with his benignant, beaming, cheery face, deep-toned but softly modulated voice and fatherly manner. To be married by Judge Bender was a treat. And he was a past master at fee-getting. Upon the completion of the ceremony when the bridegroom asked: "What is a reasonable fee?" Bender would look lingeringly and admiringly at the feminine end of the life contract and murmur, "As you have received—" The reply ended in a climax of visual appreciation for the bride. The dollar bridegroom invariably raised to two, while a spendthrift jumped to ten.

So, naturally, Judge Bender frowned. But he was of the conciliatory nature and inclined toward peace. "I am not particularly enamored of the present system, but you know very plainly that even when dividing with Mr. Converse, my runner, I am doing handsomely. However, if you will consent to my retaining forty per cent of the gross, you to divide sixty between you, it will be agreeable."

Hawkins, with me on his side, saw his opportunity and, with more friendliness than usual, struggled to reduce Bender to the equal basis. Finally we were successful.

"I dread to throw Mr. Converse out of work," sighed Bender. "There's a man with a heaven-given talent!"

The runner had more than talent—he was a genius, the finest matrimonial soother and persuader ever developed to the art. A Harvard graduate, a student of Keats and Browning, an immaculate dresser, a man of pleasing countenance and cultivation, and, strangely, a lover of his strange business, he had thrived and prospered. He easily averaged eight dollars a day.

When an embarrassed couple emerged from Cupid Carter's Bureau, Converse met the pair in the hall. Avoiding even a suggestion of cheap solicitation he usually opened in a friendly tone: "I am a friend of the Judge's. Let me help you to avoid undue embarrassment by directing you to a quiet place. I know just how you feel. A dear little wife at home myself."

In a few moments he had them at their ease and headed for Bender's court, talking to the near bride about his wife's muffins. Or, on occasion, he would quote a tender passage from Browning or Tom Moore. In short, Converse was irresistible. From the sprightliest of jest to the tenderest of sentiment, he ranged in perfect harmony.

He took the dismissal badly. Bender broke the news as gently as he could, even offering to help secure him a clerk-

ship, but Converse loved his work too well. He left, breathing revenge to the last.

The first month's division of the wedding fees on the new basis was splendid, each of us receiving $140; and Hawkins felt almost kindly toward Bender.

But the cheering improvement did not last long, for the next month the fees sagged to one hundred; and when the banner month of June swung by and we netted only sixty-five dollars each, Hawkins became suspicious. Very much agitated he came into my chambers late one afternoon and blurted out:

"I am convinced Bender is holding out! He was honest the first month, but he can't hold up to it!"

I have always thought well of Bender. "Don't be too hasty," I advised. "There may be legitimate fluctuations in the business."

"You're wrong! I've looked up statistics. Couples swarm in June," he snapped back. "Bender is retaining!"

"But times are abnormal," I answered lightly. "Crops are poor. Maybe it's Wall Street. You can always blame Wall Street. The bears haven't covered well."

I was joking of course, but he cut me off sharply, "He's stealing!"

I shrugged my shoulders in disapproval, and then his eyes lit up brightly. "I have an idea!"

"Jitney judges aren't supposed to have them," I broke in.

He paid no attention, but talked right on. "I surmise Bender's doing a full wedding calendar at his home evenings. We'll fix a plant!"

"How so?"

"We can't afford to allege without evidence. Before I was elected I controlled a lot of cheap clients. I know a number of fellows that wanted to get married but lacked initiative. Now my plan is to rig up several marriages, loan money for rings and marriage fees if necessary and ship them out to Bender's for the ceremony. We'll catch him if he doesn't turn in the money; you remember we agreed on fullest of reports. We'll have our couples for evidence."

"I don't enthuse," I remarked. "Still if you want to advance the money I'll file no demurrers. Moreover, I'd enjoy watching the show."

That very afternoon I learned something that made me sit up very straight. I was out on a little water excursion, and feeling a bit tired went to my stateroom. The boat was a ratty, old one, without complete partitions between quarters and soon a low familiar voice came drifting to my ears. It belonged to Cupid Carter. The one that answered was high-pitched and twangy, and it took me several moments to place it as the property of the Reverend Burleigh Potter! Reverend Potter who sought the crumbs, you will remember. The theme was the wedding business.

Cupid was going crooked and it pained me. "These justices take too much time from their bench work to marry people," he was saying. "It isn't right. Now I am entitled to a share in the game and I'm going to get it. I will recommend every couple that wants a preacher-wedding to you, and a few who don't. We'll split, fifty-fifty."

"Pick out the good business," came back the purring notes of the pastor. Then came a silence and his voice changed as he delved more deeply into his thoughts: "Say—ah—er, don't you think, as I perform the labors, that I should receive a little larger per cent., perhaps sixty?"

Cupid didn't like it and there was acid in his voice as he answered: "One-half is more than fair for you. As custodian of the License Bureau don't I control the business? Of course, if you are not satisfied—"

Potter found it profitable to be satisfied, Carter continued: "I'm turning out about fifty couples a day. About sixty per cent. get married in a civilized way. The balance should come to you."

"Isn't my ceremony as civilized as any other?" the Reverend Potter spluttered. "Except in rushes I give them both Mendelssohn's and the Lohengrin Wedding March. What more could be asked for $2.50? In slack times I throw in orange blossoms on the chance of netting a five."

"It pays to treat 'em liberal," commented Cupid. Then in lowered voices they discussed profits.

When Hawkins called me into his office to watch him clinch his evidence, I told him nothing of Cupid's deflection. If there might be a salutary lesson in store for the irritating justice, well and good.

Hawkins's exhibits were as well designed for a circus as a courtroom. He had a pair of freaks that were immense. A long, skinny beanpole, arrayed in the garb of the male, with a fade-away chin, watery eyes, straw shocked hair and the smile of the ewe lamb, was planned as the life partner of a rolling, heaving, red-faced tonnage of human love-sickness that cast its eyes with the fond light of an all embracing, protecting love upon its life's selection.

Following my introduction to this contemplative evidence, Hawkins tackled a pair of grease exuding Italians.

"Now, Enrico Umberto Lombrosio," he advised, "make the plunge. Swim out. Expand. You want the biggest banana business in town, but you are afraid of Louisa!"

"Notta the girla," denied the son of Italy, "so mucha the costa. Louisa too expense!"

"I'll give you a lift. Five dollars for the ring, five for incidentals and wedding fee. Be sure to be married by Justice Bender. Tell him you want to go out to his house. You see, I would marry you myself, but I am new to the game. When any of my old friends come before me I don't feel comfortable. Judge Bender will make you feel like a brother."

Exhibit C, the male half of the pair of Swedes, was harder to line up. The bashful swain had grown indifferent.

"Yulya," began the light haired son of the North, "she ban too slow; too long. I want one fine little girl yet."

"Got one in mind?"

"No, yust looking."

"Stay with Julia. No lively little woman would have you. Don't wait till you're an old man before you get your judgment. I saw Julia with a handsome American."

"Where?" broke in the Swede, jealous on the instant.

"Never mind. Close up the deal this evening. If you need a dollar or two, see me. But don't ask me to marry you. Go to Judge Bender."

The best of plans — and Hawkins's was not so bad, for he coached his nuptial witnesses carefully—often go amiss. The boomerang the justice aimed followed the usual habit of boomerangs, but in rather a roundabout way. I'll tell the story as it presented itself to me.

I didn't expect ever to see the bridal pairs again, though I awaited developments with some anticipation.

Hawkins was so emphatically sure of trapping Judge Bender that you may imagine my amazement when, two days after the scheme was under way, as I was coming up the courthouse steps to enter my chambers, without warning I ran upon Hawkins's "planted" couples, all three of them, coming toward me, and in the fore was the magnetic Converse!

I fairly gurgled in my amazement. In what marvelous manner had the sextet switched? Not only was Converse in the fore, but he was dripping metaphors, hyperboles and pure English in bubbling profusion by the wayside; and those couples looked supremely happy.

Fortunately Converse did not see me, as I quickly sprang behind a statue of the father of our country.

"You can be married," Converse was purling along, "in a pretty little home, with flowers, sunshine and the softest

and sweetest music. The fragrant scent of orange blossoms, the resting, soothing benediction of a goodly man upon you, the—"

"You ban great," broke in the big Swede. "Yulya, I feel like crying for the old mutter back at home—"

"Mucha da class," added the Dago. "Louisa, I love you better than alla th' banan' in the wida world."

The freaks seemed to be struggling with unrelievable emotions. Converse went on, never cracking a smile, but attending strictly to the business in hand.

Where could he be going? With whom was he now in partnership? Surely not the Reverend Burleigh Potter.

Not caring to follow the brigade of matrimonial cohorts, but anxious to note developments, I hastened to a convenient courtroom window to view proceedings.

Up the street they went, as comical a band of misfits as ever sun shone upon. The banana king, tightly clutching his adorable Louisa, the Swedish pair, cluttering over the entire width of sidewalk and the freaks, lovingly bringing up the rear, were only less interesting than the fashionable Converse, nattily attired, out there in front, lightly swinging a pearl handled cane.

And then unexpected things began to happen and with speed. The door of Reverend Potter's parlors swung open and the fat little preacher, hands wide extended in welcome, invited the party in. He could be seen looking up at Cupid Carter's windows as if for instructions.

The sextet halted, started a flank movement toward the door and suddenly I caught Converse's sharp command.

"Don't go in there! It is not the place!" came the staccato order.

There came a storm of protest, and I could see Potter losing much of his dignity, fighting for his seeming rights. His charlatan hypocrisy completely melted in the fear of a loss of wholesale business. "These people were directed to me!" his shrill little voice carried through the air. "They are mine I tell you, mine!" he raged.

The Swedes, amazement on their faces, stood in uncertain attitudes, while Enrico and Louisa, from wonder turned to anger.

"The gama I see!" challenged the banana prince. "You marry for mon! Busines', so. I know. Fatta commish!"

The rising tones of altercation ascending attracted spectators to the courthouse windows, Judge Hawkins among them.

"Look!" I exclaimed. "There goes your evidence!"

One look at Converse, and Hawkins, jumping at horrible conclusions, started for the stairs.

"Wait!" I exclaimed. "Don't lose your head. See! There is more coming."

From out an entrance further up the street a big, brawny figure emerged. He was clothed in the solemn garments of the ministry, but Hawkins, keenly observing, recognized the bulking form of his erstwhile runner.

"Audrey Stevens, the ex-minister!" he ejaculated. "There's where our business has been disappearing! He's joined forces with Converse! What a team!"

"The huge new comer bore down upon the gathering and I could plainly see the perplexity on his sober face. And then the commercial battle threatened to turn into a riot. It was undoubtedly the fiercest competitive struggle in the annals of matrimony.

Ranged beside Converse the redoubtable Stevens, extending both hands before him, tried to quiet the tumult, but Potter's protesting voice rose wailingly above the din.

Then, as matters rose to a climax Hawkins and I were suddenly gripped by a pair of heavy hands on our shoulders and the hearty voice of Justice Bender boomed in our ears:

"Immense, isn't it? And to think, I married those three couples this morning!"

For Justice Hawkins it was certainly a chastening of spirit. Most fortunately for him Bender never learned of the intended plot. The marrying justice was a powerful man when enraged.

Of course you have guessed how it all came about. The polyglot couples went to Judge Bender to arrange for the ceremony. The justice had recently learned of the activities of runner Converse, now his enemy, and the presence of the several pairs gave him his inspiration. He would let Converse work on already signed up business!

In short, he married them all around early in the morning, and sent them back to Cupid Carter's on a pretext. The sextet had been instructed very carefully by Bender as to their actions when approached by the star runner. The Swedes had more brains than their exteriors called for, while Enrico Umberto Lombrosio was as crafty a little man as ever sold green fruit.

I didn't tell you just the exact finish of that strife out on the sidewalk in front of Potter's.

The son of Italy, sensing the dramatic moment and feeling the fire of battle kindled to the inspiration of love, suddenly mounted the Reverend Potter's steps and with magnificent gestures proclaimed:

"Listen. I speak! Shama all you! Shama! Never I mix busines' with love for my Louisa! Louisa, my gooda wife! Judge Bend', he marra all of us; all this morna! I marra for love! You marra for money. You worse than rotten banan!"

That speech and what it stood for sounded the death knell of the runner system and started a reform of the wedding business.

WHEN THE BAND PLAYS

By HELEN TOPPING MILLER

TO the astute officials who manage the great canal which shimmers like a silver necklace on the slender throat of the isthmus, the southeast wind is a sickly wind, breeder of black flies, sharp fevers, and sudden and bitter violence.

A week of it sets the swart, oleaginous native to slumbering uneasily in the parched shade of his house, from which sleep he rouses to whet his knife, kick his dog and prowl, a wiry, vengeful fury, lusting for disaster.

To the white man, however, is granted no such relaxation. On him the immoral wind blows like a dry, sneering breath, sucking the virtue out of his veins and leaving them full of strange desires and keen unrest. It is when the southeast wind blows that the owners of the reeking hot cockpits in remote corners of the city of Panama, spread down fresh sawdust and retire into shadowy corners, grinning complacently. Also the gentlemanly pirates who purvey pungent drinks in gourds beaded with moisture, wax prosperous and insolent.

There had been three days of wind. The old lieutenant commanding the barracks out beyond the old Spanish church already wore an expression of settled anxiety which two weeks of stiff norther would hardly dispel. For a southeaster blows over an army post like a reckless breath from purgatory, turning sober men with wives at home into sullen devils tempered with lyddite.

Angus McGowan had neither wife nor kin. And for six weeks before the hot wind began to blow, his dark eyes had glinted with a greenish, sulky light and his chin squared in defiant moodiness above his olive drab collar. The lieutenant was not disappointed when on the third night of the wind Angus ran amuck.

It is not a joyful job to paste an iodine bandage on the hock of a restive horse when that animal, during the process of surgery, endeavors to eat hay and fight off uncounted varieties of bloodthirsty insects. Angus, struggling with a melted and twisting strip of adhesive plaster and avoiding a menacing shoe, felt an overpowering contempt for life suddenly rise up within him like a poisonous fungus, straining at his throat, surging through his limbs, and beating sullenly at the top of his head. Whereupon he cast the bandage into the water-trough, kicked the iodine bottle into saffron-hued splinters, and tramped out, under the eye of the stable boss.

Straight down through the lighted town he went, past the cafés where northern tourists bought New Jersey food at Hudson-Bay prices, past the tobacco shops and the great hotels. The band was playing on the plaza but he paid no attention. Ordinarily Angus was at his best when the band was playing. Given a certain amount of gold braid and the strains of *Semper Fidelis,* and army life intoxicated him like a deep draft of liquid glory. As long as the band played he was a strutting, high-principled savior of the nation. But to-night, with the wind sulking about him like the hot presence of a loathsome body, the band had no power to stir him. He hated it—blatant trumpet and maddening drum. He wanted to be let alone. So he stalked

out to the edge of the town where, half-hidden in a ragged thicket near the Presbyterian missionary's house, lay a black, shallow little lagoon.

The wise and efficient officials had not yet coated the face of all the waters above the earth with thick layers of oil to discourage mosquitoes, and the little lagoon glinted in the starlight, a circle of limpid jet. Angus McGowan sat down on the dock beside the missionary's boathouse, in a state of mental chaos blended of black fury and sodden discouragement. Three impulses fought for dominance of his mood. Should he drop a generous charge of nitroglycerine into the canal at the ocean gate, or should he stow himself in the hold of a Porto Rican banana boat and thereafter stoke coal all the way to Norfolk, or should he silently slide off the little dock and thus put an end to all things save a half dozen bubbles?

Miss Lucy Granger abode in the Presbyterian missionary's house and taught mathematics to the children of American officers and hotel promoters. Miss Lucy had been reared in an atmosphere of frosty propriety, navy beans and shorthorn cattle, on a sandy Michigan farm. Just why she had chosen to leave the shelter of the family windmill to steam humidly in the languid air of the canal zone was something which her outraged family was unable to fathom. Miss Lucy however, was very well satisfied; or she had been, until the southeast wind began to blow. When the hot, wicked currents, drifting restlessly up from the steaming, savage jungles of the Amazon river, smote her, several disturbing things happened to Miss Lucy.

First of all, she found it hard to tolerate the modest dotted swiss dress and canvas shoes that she wore. She longed fervently for the primitive freedom of the cave-woman, robed in the pelt of an outraged flying squirrel. She longed to go in swimming; the cool depths of the padre's well tempted her madly. So on this night she compromised by dragging a thick, one-piece swimming suit from the bottom of her trunk and setting forth, stealthily, alone, in the black, insect-melodic night.

Her pedantic modesty somehow drained and altered by the vagabond wind, Miss Lucy tiptoed to the missionary's boathouse and donned the bathing suit in discrete and breathless darkness. Then mindful of scorpions, she sidled nervously out to the edge of the lagoon and slipped in.

Now, to plunge, side-on, into a Michigan lake, where the water is green and fairly deep and the bottom is gravel and clean, is one thing, but to slide into a greasy Panamanian lagoon, where pigs wallow by day and conscienceless citizens dump garbage by night, is something very different. And this Miss Lucy Granger discovered before her wilful feet had touched bottom, for the lagoon had no bottom. The slimy batter which lay beneath it grew thicker and heavier the farther one penetrated into it, but solidity there was none. All this Miss Granger discovered; whereupon she opened her mouth to scream, but because numbers of nameless objects promptly floated into it, she closed it quickly. What had been intended for a cry died a gurgle. Reaching out desperately, she began to tread water and struggle for something to grasp. By the black airlessness, she knew that she was under a dock, and stretched out groping hands for the posts. But only the horrible water slid between her fingers until she discovered, squarely above her head, something projecting, black and solid. With one hand she reached for it. Her fingers closed on a man's boot.

"Jeminy Cripes!" exclaimed the astonished voice of trooper McGowan.

"Help!" squeaked Miss Granger, in a thin and weary little voice.

Angus had been sitting in moody contemplation of the black water, wondering just what portion of it was deepest. But one cannot plunge into a lagoon of a dark

night and leave an unknown young lady of faint voice but certain grip, floundering unsalvaged in the flood. So Angus gave up conjecturing.

"Leggo by boot," he commanded.

Miss Lucy let go. Promptly she fell, like a plummet, some eight feet into the combination of substances which gravity had collected at the bottom of the river, recovered herself with a spasmodic little kick and bobbed to the surface again.

By this time McGowan was on hand with an oar which he had found under the eaves of the missionary's boathouse.

"Grab it," he shouted, poking it awkwardly in her general direction.

Miss Granger grabbed it.

Angus McGowan was built broad in the beam, like a dreadnaught, and the girl was slender. But even the wispiest of women acquire a sodden weightiness when forked up bodily out of a lagoon, dripping and flopping like a sunfish. Angus swung his catch awkwardly upon the dock and sat down and gasped. Miss Granger, landing in a heap, sat up and gasped.

Angus recovered his voice first. "Don't you know any better than to swim after dark?" he demanded.

Miss Granger pushed her wet hair out of her mouth and spat out several things. She had an uncomfortable suspicion that some enthusiastic small creature with many legs was travelling up her spine.

"It's so hot!" she whimpered at last.

"In two minutes more," growled her rescuer, "you'd have been under the mud. They'd have picked you up around by the padre's duck puddle about four o'clock to-morrow afternoon."

"But it was so—hot!" pleaded the girl, still writhing frantically in an effort to dislodge the crawling beast.

"Oh, was it?" repeated trooper McGowan, most impolitely. "And because it's hot why— Come on, Mamie, let's jump in the river!"

Then the mocking falsetto of his voice fell swiftly. In earlier days he had been reared the proper son of a pious old Scotch Presbyterian father. Something of that better era came into his tone as he rose up.

"Are you cold?" he inquired respectfully. "You're shaking."

Miss Lucy Granger was rent between nervous terror of the thing which jigged up her back and a sudden maidenly fear of this unknown person who dragged her out of a lagoon and then growled at her like a dock hand afterwards. But panic won.

"It's crawling — something up my back!" she cried.

"Huh!" grunted McGowan.

With unabashed fingers he drew down the neck of the shabby swimming suit and explored the wet little shoulders of the mathematics teacher from Michigan, while she sat shuddering at the awfulness of it. Then he drew the intruder forth—one of those dry, crackling, many-legged beetles which glide hideously over the top of the water. Miss Granger heard the thing spat in the lagoon.

"Now—you'd better go home," he advised.

She rose up, but her knees shook under her. Her teeth rattled and she reached convulsively, gripping the front of his coat.

"It's—I'm all right," she chattered presently, when he had braced her upright and steadied her with a strong hand on her shoulders. "I guess—I'm cold—that's all!"

"Come along; I'll hold you," ordered McGowan, steering her off the dock.

The mud at the end of it was cool and sticky, and Miss Granger's toes sank into it. Somehow, the mud suggested snakes, and she jerked her feet up gingerly. Also the green vines, snarled about the boathouse, reeked of terror. A sickening fear seized her. How had she dared to come alone—in this darkness? She had never before experienced the madness which comes with the southeast

wind. Then she turned suddenly cold all over.

"My clothes," she whispered, "they're in there—in that boathouse!"

The man gallantly let go her arm. "I'll run along," he said politely. "You'd better get 'em on. You're shaking all over."

But the stiffness was all gone out of her spine. She crumpled down in a heap among the terrifying vines and reached frantically for his retreating coattail.

"I can't!" she wailed. "I'm afraid. I can't go in there—it's so dark!"

"Gee whiz!" eloquently murmured trooper McGowan.

Once more he stood her on her feet and held her until she could stand alone. Then most respectfully he advanced into the boathouse, from whence he presently emerged with a chaste white bundle.

"Where are your stockings?" he asked bluntly.

The kindly night hid the burning embarrassment upon Miss Granger's face. She could have died of shame—and yet she dare not brave the black horror of that boathouse.

"Inside the shoes," she said, so faintly as scarcely to be heard.

"Now," he said briskly, "you'd better hustle. Wherever you live we'd better get there quick. You're likely to get a bad fever from that filthy water."

But the girl drew back. "I'd better go alone," she suggested timidly. "I live right here—at the missionary's."

"All right," he agreed. "I'll wait here."

She tiptoed away. Then in a moment she came flying back, a white, unguessed garment flapping like a banner.

"They're all on the porch," she gasped; "the Baptist one and the English professor; I can't go in—like this!"

He looked at her. In the faint starlight her limbs shone very white and her garment appeared amazingly scanty.

"No," he agreed, "you couldn't."

"If I had a light—"

"I'll get you one," he volunteered.

He struck off through the thicket. She waited, crouched on the doorstep of the boathouse, her apparel under her arm. Then he came back. Without a word he jerked the hasp of the boathouse door loose and stepped inside, lighted a bit of candle and skewered it on the oarlock.

"I swiped it out of the church," he said. "The old saint who had it didn't need it. They'll give him another one to-morrow."

Miss Granger stepped inside. In the wavering yellow light of the candle she surveyed her rescuer. He was tall and rather handsome, in a dark, sullen, fashion, with stiff black hair brushed straight back from a high forehead. And he was in the olive drab of the cavalry.

"You're a soldier?" she asked.

He nodded. Some of the old discontent now showed like embers in his eyes. For in the canal zone the white women have a way of looking at troopers of the line, a kindly way, something like the look they give a faithful negro servant or a friendly dog. Miss Lucy Granger looked at Angus McGowan now, like that.

"Yes, I'm a soldier," he said.

And then, as if in answer to her look, he stared at her very straight. And Miss Granger, remembering what the oily lagoon had done to her hair and her ugly bathing suit, blushed painfully.

Even in her fresh dotted swiss and panama hat, Miss Granger was not pretty. The yellow tropic sun had baked such beauty out of her skin as had been fostered by the frosty Michigan air. She was swarthy and a bit faded, with fine sunlines about her eyes and the prim mouth, which is a purely scholastic acquisition. Her hair, which ordinarily lay brown and smooth, an even chestnut shade in every strand and curl, was drabbed and black with water. Never beautiful, she appeared most unbeautiful in the searching light of the little candle.

McGowan steadied the boat until she climbed into it, and dumped her clothes

on the seat. Then he went out and closed the door.

Would he wait, she wondered?

But Angus, having recovered rather abruptly from the madness which had stirred in him for weeks, did not wait.

A week went by—a week of southeast wind, drinking the earth dry and demanding steam of all living—a week of inert, irritating heat and of sharp thunder unaccompanied by merciful rain. And for Miss Lucy Granger, a week of maddening calculus, of homicidal geometry and of intolerable trigonometry, of restless sleep in her airless room in the Presbyterian missionary's house—and of puzzled wonder.

Against the dark drabness of her days, the sharp recklessness of that one wild night stood out like a splash of red paint. She bore the memory of it about with her like a guilty token sewn into her garment, which she brought out and gazed at whenever she was alone. And with the thought of it came always a confused shame and a vague wonder. She watched the soldiers, occasional details of which tramped through the streets, but never yet had she discovered a sullen, handsome face, set under a high forehead and stiff black hair.

So at last, on a sultry afternoon, she tucked two dozen Euclidean propositions into the drawer of her desk, interring them under a weighty mail-order catalogue, and fetching out her freshest hat, walked out to the barracks beyond the old Spanish church.

It was a long walk and weary, but the wind was in her ears again—the wild world wind which sifts madness from every people on the earth and scatters it like pollen in its track. She did not heed the white hot condemnation of the sun, nor the dust which twisted like smoke affectionately around her.

She came into the parade ground by the town-side gate. And just at that instant, Angus McGowan, in the last lap of nine days' fatigue duty, drove across the parade ground with a stable wagon which had conveyed fertility to the quartermaster's garden.

Squarely in the path they met. And at the vision in white dotted swiss, the stolid army mules halted of their own accord. Angus stared for a minute before he remembered to pull off his hat.

"Oh," stammered Miss Lucy, "I wanted to see you—to thank you—for saving me that night."

Angus twisted uncomfortably in his seat. Nine days' fatigue is a stiff price to pay for an hour's rebellion, but so far, Angus had paid it with astonishing meekness. In a flash, he saw that the girl did not understand the situation; that she considered the armed guard who walked beside the wagon only an integral part of a bewildering army system. He ducked his head in a confused bow and answered with brief politeness.

"'T's all right," he said.

The mules started again. They were well trained army mules and any breach of the regulations was hateful in their ears. The guard also shifted his gun uneasily on his collar bone and stared quite frankly at Miss Granger; at her plain little face alight with adventure, at her eyes and her smooth, glossy, chestnut hair.

"G'wan!" snarled the guard.

The wagon moved on.

Miss Granger, thus dismissed, turned and hurried away, her cheeks scarlet, her eyes on the ground.

And thus this tale would have ended had it not been for a brown, untutored Panamanian named Antois.

That worthy, having imbided the violent breath of the southeast wind, became straightway moved to murder and arson and like joyful practices.

Antois wore a scapular and every Michaelmas day he carried a fat cock to the padre. So, being fired with atmospheric ardor and also by certain flaming liquids obtained by stealth, he set out, the whites of his eyes agleam, determined to avenge

the grievances of the church. He would begin with these puling, saint-hating Protestants, who demanded of a laborer much work for little money and ate meat on Fridays. This Presbyterian one, now —who said long prayers through his nose—his house was isolated and dry as tinder.

ANGUS MCGOWAN, having been restored to rank, walked around the little plaza on a hot night. The wind was in the southeast and it still moved in Angus's ears with strange, disquieting currents. But he put the fitful discontent which nagged him aside, with only a vague wonder as to what ailed him.

The band was playing. Angus was at his best when the band played. He sat down at the little table outside the charmed circle where the officers sat with their ladies and drank black coffee flavored with condensed cream made in Waukegan, Illinois, and opened a half-cold bottle of ginger ale. He had hardly coaxed the foam off the top of it when a scrubby soldier plunged into the crowd.

"The niggers have fired Doctor Caldwell's house," he cried.

There was a clatter of chairs and a few women cried out. Angus's bottle rolled, blubbering, to the ground. Doctor Caldwell was the Presbyterian missionary.

"But they're not at home," exclaimed a woman with some relief. "They left for Colon this morning."

Angus bent mechanically to rescue the bottle. Then he straightened so suddenly that his spine fairly cracked. The girl—the little, plain, wide-eyed girl—the girl he had fished out of the lagoon! Was she there—alone?

Like a flame he tore through the crowd, thrusting them to right and left. He knew now what the uneasiness was which had scorched him for days; it was the memory of a pair of brown eyes under a panama hat and a swarthy, sensitive little face and a mouth that quivered!

He ran, hardly knowing where, blindly his heart pounding. Ahead of him, against the black sky, danced a devilish little flare of light—orange and red and billowing purple.

Other men ran, too, but Angus paid no heed to them. He crashed through the thicket that skirted the lagoon, missing the road. Flame was rolling up the low wall of the missionary's house now and the light of it was scarlet on the water. Angus tore through the little garden, crushing the melons under his feet, and vaulted a low fence.

Then out of the gloom something white rose up—a swart, low figure with eyes agleam. There was a leap of acrid flame in Angus's face and a dull roar. He felt his arm leap into the air and then fall back, aching dully. A hot, spinning pain, that seemed to scatter sparks, crashed through his shoulder; but he did not halt.

He leaped upon the crouching white figure and bore it to the ground. Biting, kicking and screaming, he pinioned it down, and having no weapon, he rained, blows from his heavy boots upon the dark, maddened face of Antois, the pillager, until the black man lay prone and jerked no more. Then Angus scrambled up and disregarding the pain that tore at him like the fangs of a beast, ran around the blazing house. The roof was a heaving torch by now and the light of it lay like a searchlight on the faces of the men who thronged and tramped in the little yard.

Twice Angus circled the house, frantic, half mad. Then in the dark little chicken-house he found her, hiding in a corner, her naked feet peeping from under a thin purple kimono, her hair tumbling down her back in a waving chestnut mane. Straight into his arms she came like a frightened child, with such terror in her eyes as rouses white men to fury. Angus thought of the twitching bundle behind the garden fence, and vengeful satisfaction was in his soul.

"He came in," she gasped, clinging to him, horror still keen upon her. "I heard him on the stairs; and Old Anna ran. I shall never forget his awful eyes—never! And I ran and screamed—and I hid out here. He searched a little while and then he set fire to the house."

Angus stooped a little and gathered her close. She was very small and light, and the feel of her thin, quivering, little body went through him like a pain.

"Hang on to me," he said. "I'll take you to some of the women. They'll look after you."

She slipped an arm around his neck. Very simply she did it, as a child might have done. Then she drew back with a shrill cry.

"It's blood!" she screamed. "You're hurt!"

Angus laughed.

"He winged me—the nigger did," he scoffed. "It's nothing. I'll get it fixed pretty soon."

And having spoken thus lightly, he turned and reeled a little, and tumbled in an inert khaki crumple at her feet.

For eight weeks Angus McGowan lay in the hospital with a shattered shoulder, while the army surgeons labored to bring back life to the arm without which McGowan would be of little value in the army. The southeast wind died away wearily, and the cool northers began to blow. Then the surgeons ordered Angus to get up and walk, adding that a Brazilian ship would sail in a fortnight and that he might as well go home.

All that day Angus sat in his bunk and brooded. With the contradictoriness which is part of our subtle nature, Angus thrust out of the army, suddenly found himself longing to be back in the thick of it. The band played, and he rose up and paced his room and cursed. A ship blew a mournful siren outside the ocean gate, and he buried his face in his hands and hated the world and all the things which be above the firmament.

At night the southeast wind came up out of the sea once more and blew its vandal breath among the banana leaves and the sentinel palms. Also the moon was born, a swollen moon, very yellow and intimate, with such a knowing grin as vagabond moons wear.

Angus McGowan, burrowing in his hot bunk, in the hospital annex, hung his coat over the window to shut out the light of it. But like vapor it sifted in, painting strange pictures on the walls until Angus writhed with the restlessness that was in him. Then he rose up, and as best he could, struggled one-armed into his clothes. Down the post street he went and through the city where the uneasy wind was moving, and out to the little thicket where the Presbyterian missionary's boathouse was and the padre's ducks paddled happily in the lagoon, talking caressing duck talk in the moonlight.

For a long time Angus sat on the little dock, staring into the black water. Then, with a sudden squaring of his shoulders, he rose up and marched along the path to the new house of the missionary—very new and unpainted and silvery and odorous of fresh-sawed wood.

He found her on the screened porch, correcting examination papers by the smutty light of a little oil lamp. She had on a limp green dress, and somehow she looked tired out and old. He walked in without ceremony and flopped down into a sagging canvas chair. She had come to the hospital many times, but always the orderly had waited. There were many things he had to tell her, so he plunged in abruptly.

"That day—at the barracks—" he began without preamble, "I—I wanted to talk to you—but I was under guard."

"You—what?" she asked.

"They had me in—nine days," he explained, shortly, "for skipping out."

"In the guard house?" she demanded.

"Nine days," he repeated. "It was worth it," he stammered, coloring.

A flush crept into Miss Lucy's face, and some of the tired age went out of it.

"In the guard house," she exclaimed, indignantly, "for saving me from drowning!"

"No," said Angus; "for running off without leave. But I'm not sorry—now."

"How is your arm?" she inquired suddenly.

"Punk," he announced. "They're sending me home—to-morrow."

Miss Lucy closed her eyes. But in spite of her pedantic self-control her lips quivered.

To-morrow! And there would be Euclid and trigonometry and the problem of the three unknown quantities for her to-morrow—and the other to-morrows. Some of the sick misery she felt showed in her piteous face; whereupon Angus McGowan did a thing that surprised even himself. He bent and kissed Miss Lucy Granger full on her prim, twitching mouth. Then he ripped off the sling that held the arm, and straightened it—the arm that the bullet of mad Antois had splintered. Wrist and elbow and shoulder he bent it, slowly, with a bit of a wince. It was one-sided and a little stiff; but it was an arm—a strong man's arm.

"Will you go home with me—sweetheart—" he asked huskily—"to-morrow?"

Miss Lucy nodded—a little nod. She could not speak because her throat ached intolerably.

Angus moved over quite boldly and gathered her into his good arm. "Put out that darn light," he commanded hoarsely.

Up on the plaza, the bass-horn man blew the water out of his valves and took a long, deep breath. The snare drummer tightened his drum-head and poised his sticks. The cornet player turned his eyes to heaven.

"Mid pleasures and palaces—" tooted the band.

"He—he—he!" laughed the southeast wind.

NO OTHER GODS BEFORE ME

By FREDERICK J. JACKSON

THERE'S something about the idea that makes me uneasy. I don't like it! Ever been in a church? Ever pray?"

The face of Peel, the beachcomber, crinkled like tanned leather as he laughed derisively, laughed as when he had escaped the firing squad in Callao and crossed the Pacific to the Philippines.

"Me in a church? Me pray? If ever I pray it'll be for a stack of gold. The yellow god is all I'll ever look up to! Say," he demanded, suspiciously, "you ain't thinkin' of backin' out, are you? 'Cause you can't, see! You've got to figure this out for us!"

Miller, feverish and wan, looked at Peel. "Oh, no, I'm not backing out," he said, resignedly.

"You'd be crazy!" Peel declared. "I told you about the galleon that brought the treasure to the Philippines, didn't I? Those cups and vessels of soft, pure gold the monks used in services. Stole 'em, the Spaniards did! And they squealed like stuck pigs when the French and British bucaneers stole 'em in turn!"

"Aw, that was some hundred years ago."

"What of it? The missions here have the gold yet, and that old paper I found in Callao tells all about the secret hiding place."

Peel, Miller and three others sat beneath a mango tree on the edge of the jungle. A whaleboat was beached fifty yards away, while spread out before them was the Sulu sea, a sheet of red and gold flame in the setting sun.

Said Miller: "I think we'd better start now."

With Peel and Miller still mumbling over the plans, they shoved the boat off the beach and set out, as though fleeing from the darkness which crept out from land with tropical haste. Through the early evening the oarsmen pulled along quietly, keeping a course parallel to the shore line where the little ripples of the quiet sea lapped with an ever-changing fringe of phosphorous. Occasionally, a ground-swell swept in, lifted the boat, dropped it again, and passed on to break with a roar and a line of fire along the shingle.

The dark wall of mangroves and jungle broke off, and gave way to an occasional palm hut and to cultivated fields. A little later the men in the boat could make out the indistinct outlines of what they knew to be the mud walls around the Mission of Santa Marta.

Vaguely, a chapel and cloister loomed up on the hill in the tropical starlight, the whitewashed towers of the bells rising higher like twin sentinels, and standing wraithlike against the skyline.

Miller peered ahead, and finally headed the boat towards the beach. "In with the oars!" was his hushed order.

It was quietly obeyed. The keel grated on the sand. The men sprang out, seized the gunwhales, and with the aid of a breaking swell, hauled the boat out of water.

Stealthily, they made their way toward the mission, dark and silent as a place of the dead. Peel scaled the outer gates, and opened them from within. They groped through the patio to the chapel under the bell-towers. The door opened

to Miller's touch and they entered. Peel struck a match and lighted a bull's-eye lantern.

Down an aisle, past row upon row of straight-backed seats, he led them directly towards the altar, grinning as he noticed the furtive glances from his men as they scanned the empty seats. The beachcomber flashed his light around, and then reached up to a figure of the Virgin as if to pull it down.

Miller choked on a word of protest at the vandalism.

"I know what I'm doin'!" said Peel. The entire altar swung back.

"Now— Here's where they keep it, boys!" There was nervous exultation in his tone as he stepped into a narrow chamber. They crowded in.

Kranz, slow-thinking and of few words licked his lips at the sight of the reward. Jones, a big Cockney, and Harris, the mulatto, crouched side by side, their eyes shining hungrily.

There was no delay. Miller and Peel began packing the gleaming objects into a chest. Suddenly they straightened. In the unnatural quiet, sandalled feet could be heard shuffling across the patio.

A monk entered the chapel. Down the aisle he hurried, carrying a flare high over his head to light his way. As the group at the altar came into the light, the hand of the brother trembled.

"Hold! What is this?" He saw the altar swung back and the treasure exposed. "Ye desecrators of that which is holy; ye profaners of that which is pure! My children, think, for ye know not what ye do!"

An oath ripped from Peel. A bolt of fire flashed in the dull half-light. The explosion was deafening in the narrow confines. It echoed and re-echoed among the rafters.

"Oh, my God! What have you done?" gasped Miller, dropping to the side of the fallen monk.

"Come on, you fool!" Peel was in command now. He led the exit from the chapel, staggering along with his men under the weight of the chest.

"Poor fool! Poor blind fool!" Miller sobbed. "He doesn't know what he's done!" He knelt over the monk again.

"Thank the Lord he's not dead!" For a moment he hesitated, then crossed himself fervently, the first time in years, and followed through the doors into the patio.

The following moments were only a nightmare to Miller. He found himself outside the mud walls, covering the retreat of the men. Shot after shot he fired over the heads of the scantily-clad people in the gateway to prevent pursuit. Sobbing and cursing wildly, he ran to the beach. Then he was in the boat, crouching in the stern as he steered for open water, while four husky backs strained at the oars.

Patches of phosphorescent fire swirled, and boiled, and sucked, and made miniature whirlpools behind each ashen blade as it bent and bit sharply through the water. Astern, the narrow wake of the whaleboat was a ribbon of living fire, glowing fitfully.

A bullet whined sharply overhead. Another ricochetted from the water a dozen feet away, and hummed off into the distance. The tip of an oar was splintered by a shot. Bullets whizzed by on all sides, then the boat drew out of range.

"We made such a hell of a fuss, the garrison from the fort almost nipped us," laughed Peel, looking back at the futile flashes.

"Huh. All they see's our wake," replied Miller, as he changed the course of the boat.

"How's she headin'?" inquired Peel, with a glance at the stars.

"East by south!"

"That's about right!"

On they rowed through the night. Miller leaned over the compass and watched it in the light of the bull's-eye.

There was no moon. An overhead haze gradually obscured the sky. The southern cross disappeared. The night became

inky-black, a tropical night, with a velvety, all-enveloping darkness.

Furtively Miller began shifting the course of the whaleboat. The oarsmen failed to notice that the swells were coming from ahead now, instead of from abeam; and the boat was soon heading off at right angles to the course it originaly held.

So they passed the night. At intervals two of the rowers alternated to rest their tired muscles. This was but very seldom, however, for they were spurred on by fear of what lay behind them, that, and the thought of lustful pleasure ahead. As they rowed, they talked spasmodically, made plans for the future, and of how each would dispose of his share.

"I tell you, boys, we'd better scatter for awhile," concluded Peel; "we've sure stirred up one hell of a mess. When we get to Miradora I'm goin' to make my way around to Manila in a sampan. That's inconspicuous enough, if a fellow is alone. I know a Chink who'll melt my share of the gold cups and crosses and things into little bars. That'll destroy all evidence. Takin' no chances, I ain't!"

"Goot idea!" commended Kranz.

"Not for me!" declared the stroke oar, the big Cockney. "Hi knows w'ere Hi can get the top price in 'Ong Kong."

"Singapore for this bird!" announced the next oar, Harris, the mulatto. Harris was over six feet, a brute in every way. He was a deserter from a United States gunboat on the China station.

On and on they planned doubtful pleasures and amusements, but they did not look into the eyes of the man who sat crouched in the stern, nor see the set of his lips as he listened to their plans and all the time held the boat steadily to the northward.

Morning came. The oriental sun popped gorgeously above the horizon, and rapidly dispersed the overhead mist.

Jones arose to his feet, apparently much puzzled. Instead of the green islands expected, he saw nothing but the flat, oily expanse of water, broken only by an occasional sluggish swell which came sweeping down from the north.

"Hi carn't hunderstand this," he announced. "There hought to be land by the blooming boat right now. Crikey! Look where the sun is! Bly me, hif we hyn't been 'eadin' north!" His eyes grew chilly with sudden suspicion. He looked at Miller, who glared defiantly.

Jones hauled in his oar and started aft. "Lemme see that compass!" he demanded. Then he leaped back. Instead of looking at the compass, he found himself staring into the ugly snout of a huge navy revolver. He could see the hammer drawn back under Miller's thumb. Half in bewilderment, Jones sank back on the seat.

"Wot the 'ell, Bill?" he wondered.

Peel started to arise at the sight of the revolver. Dazed, he sat down mechanically as Miller turned the muzzle in his direction.

"Got the drop on you!" Miller snapped out. "Bat an eye wrong, or move a hand, any one of you, and your prayers are said! You know how I shoot! Now Jones, unbuckle your belt. Easy! Don't put your hooks on that gun! Now—drop it over the side!"

Sullenly, Jones obeyed. The others looked on in sheer amazement. Little bubbles arose playfully to the surface as the .45 and the belt of shells sank into the blue depths.

"Now, Harris, the same!" and the mulatto's gun went overboard. Peel and Kranz were likewise disarmed, and Miller settled back to the tiller.

"Now, row, you dogs, row!" he ordered.

A strange contrast was Miller as he held the four oarsmen in subjection with his revolver. Pale, a hectic flush on his cheeks, thin to the point of emaciation, he was a sick man. A man less iron-willed than he would have been prostrate. His eyes were glowing a bit too brightly after the sleepless nights, and the flush burned deeper than the evening before.

Primitive types all, any of the men could have crushed him. But they were cowed. They stood in deadly fear of him. Had they not seen him shoot? He had shot every pip from the six of spades from a distance at which any of them would probably have missed the card. He had outshot and killed "Pig-eyed" Scanlon in Hong Kong, Scanlon who was known as a gunfighter from Singapore to Seoul. Miller's reputation was based on that feat. Then, too, he had a phenomenal brain. It was for this that Peel had enrolled him in the party.

They could imagine no motive for Miller's present tactics other than his love of gold. They knew only that he had betrayed them. By their code he deserved no mercy. Any one of the four cheerfully would have throttled Miller and flung him into the sea.

While inwardly cursing him, their gaze was riveted in fascination on the chest where he sat. This was of oak, worm-eaten, bound and studded heavily with brass, which was nearly eaten off by the verdigris of two or three centuries. Two rotted leather straps had fallen from around the chest. A dead sort of thing!

"You dirty sneak!" swore Peel, glaring at Miller. "We oughta known better than trust you. You weren't one of us!"

"No compliments, Mister Peel, if you please," returned Miller. "Save your breath! You'll need it before we reach San Miguel."

"San Miguel!" gasped Peel. "You're crazy! Don't you know that San Miguel is over a hundred and fifty miles from Santa Marta?"

"Sure I know," acknowledged Miller, "and you better pass that water-breaker aft. You fellows hit it up too freely last night. We'll need it later."

"San Miguel!" repeated Harris. Then he fairly foamed at the mouth and directed a stream of abuse at Miller.

"That will do, Harris! You keep your fly-trap closed mighty tight, sing low, and put a little muscle behind that oar, or I might accidentally overlook you a couple of times when I pass out this water."

Harris subsided, but his dark, sullen eyes, with their dissipated, yellowed whites, glowed with bitter hatred. A little later the mulatto broke out again.

"Harris," said Miller slowly, "to tell the truth, I'd just as soon shoot you as look at you, and I'm looking right at you. I may have broken all the ten commandments, but there are things which even I draw the line on, and I have as much use for a depraved beast like you as I have for a cobra."

Miller distributed food to the men. He sat munching on a cake of sea-biscuit, when he suddenly choked on a piece. He coughed violently a few times, then still harder, doubling up with pain. His face became congested, he was strangling.

Like a tiger ready to spring, Harris had been watching. As Miller lowered his head, Harris dropped his oar, and dashed at the sick man. The oar of Jones, the stroke, was in Harris's path. He lost a fraction of a second in hurdling over it. Two more steps and he would have reached Miller. That lost fraction of a second was fatal. Miller raised his head and saw.

Coldly, camly, dispassionately, almost disinterestedly it seemed, he lifted the gun and shot Harris through the heart. The mulatto straightened erect at the smash of the bullet. The evil in his eyes turned to the surprised look of a child, then he collapsed across the Cockney's seat.

Miller's lips twisted into a sort of grim smile as he saw Jones rise to join Harris. The gun barked again. Jones screamed as a bullet smashed his ribs. A third shot, and he fell sprawling over the body of the mulatto.

Miller peered questioningly at Peel and Kranz, who had remained at their oars in the fore part of the boat. Then he resumed his racking cough until he found relief. Weak and trembling, he leaned back against the gunwale.

Finally he recovered a bit. "In with

your oars, and drop that carrion overboard!" He pointed to the bodies with the muzzle of the gun.

Harris's oar had stuck in the tholepins. Peel bumped against it, and the oar slid overboard through the pins. The beachcomber caught at it.

"Let it go along with Kranz's oar," ordered Miller. "You'll need only two. Now get back and plant some beef behind the ash."

The patches of blood on the after thwart dried quickly. In the heat of the fiery overhead sun they turned into blackened spots, which afterwards cracked into various designs. They fascinated Kranz. In pop-eyed horror he watched them through the afternoon.

It was Peel who spoke after hours of grilling work.

"My God, Miller!" he expostulated, dashing the sweat from his face, "you don't mean to say that you're keepin' on to San Miguel. That's nearly one hundred miles away, and the two of us couldn't row there in less than three days. We're not machines! This boat is too heavy for a single pair of oars. I'm about all in now!"

"We're going to San Miguel," declared Miller. He raised the revolver menacingly, meaningly.

"What's the great idea?" insisted Peel. "You can't get rid of the stuff there!"

Miller was silent for a moment. Emotions, many and varied, played on his thin countenance.

"These relics are going back to the church," he said at last. "Let me tell you something: I was brought up in the church when I was young, but I forgot its teachings. I was not impressed. I laughed at everything. I drifted low, very low. I have commanded a bloody pirate junk down on the south coast. Men have tried to kill me, many of them," he shrugged his thin shoulders and sighed self-appraisingly, "and I laughed as I killed them instead!"

"Harris, for example," interjected Peel grimly, "only you didn't laugh then!"

"This fever has been wasting me for weeks. The thought of death caused me no concern until last night. It was your wanton shooting of that monk that served to awaken me. It came to me that I may have but a short time to live, and that I must make my peace with God the best I can before I go. There is little I can do—return these sacred chalices to the church where they have been for centuries is all perhaps."

"I want to get them to San Miguel, where the Bishop is, and seek absolution from him. To have that curse lifted. 'May these sacrilegists never know Christian burial!' is what the nun screamed. That bothers me, Peel; it troubles me!"

"Aw, you and your curses make me sick," jeered Peel. "What difference does Christian burial make? When you're dead, you're dead, and that's all there is to it. I know! 'Live while you can,' is my motto. A big chance you've got of gettin' to San Miguel, you and your notions. In a day or two where'll you be for lack of sleep? Why, you ain't got a chance: You ain't strong enough to tie a knot that would hold us!"

"Perhaps," said Miller, setting his jaw stubbornly, "but you chuck a little weight on that oar, and we'll arrive sooner, for we are going to San Miguel."

A long, slate-gray shadow crept silently alongside the boat from astern.

"Christian burial!" drawled Peel with a sneer. "That tiger-shark is all the Christian burial you'll be getting. When you insist on headin' for San Miguel, you're only bitin' off a man-sized chunk that'll choke yuh. We'll be gettin' all the junk, 'stead of havin' to split with you."

"Ye-es?" said Miller. "I'll tell you this, Peel: if I can't hold out until we reach San Miguel, I'll at least see that it ain't left for you to trade for rotten pleasures. They're too sacred to be touched by your dirty hands."

Peel smiled sardonically, and well he might. Four strong men had staggered and sweated under the weight of the chest in bringing it to the beach. Two of them could scarcely lift it between them. The chest was safe now in the bottom of the boat, for Miller could never budge it, Peel reasoned.

Throughout the day the two oarsmen labored, working their hearts out under the menace of Miller's gun, and the terrible threat of no water if they soldiered on the job. At intervals of rest Miller doled water out to them, a gill at a time. In the late afternoon they slept, for Peel had fallen from his seat in a stupor caused by shear weariness.

And ever silently following them was the shark, eighteen hungry feet of ominous, grim expectancy, for the best meal in many a day had come from this boat.

Miller watched it dreamily, half in horror. A little, blue-striped pilot fish darted up to the head of the shark as though delivering a message. He shuddered.

Peel's callous words rang in his ears: "That tiger-shark is all the Christian burial you'll be gettin'!" Miller shivered again, then caught himself with a start. "Must be losing my nerve," he thought. The possibility threw a fright into him. One thought obsessed him. He awakened the sleepers, and with threats and curses drove them at the oars through the night, drove them to the limit of their endurance.

By early morning Miller was delirious. He raved of his boyhood home. An uncle had been a parish priest. The church had grown to be a nightmare to the lad of wild instincts. In his delirium he made attempts at repeating the Lord's prayer, but he had forgotten it. He essayed the ten commandments, but did little better. "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me," was the part he repeated over and over again, and he appeared to be speaking to Peel.

Peel watched him keenly, debating with himself as to whether or not Miller still retained sufficient of his faculties to shoot should he attempt to rush him.

Miller's ravings at last began to irritate Peel. "Belay that guff, Miller!" he burst out. "You'll be singing a hymn next!"

Miller recovered himself with a start. "And if I do, you'll have to join in the chorus!" he retorted.

The monotonous thump of the oars in the tholepins seemed to want to lull him into disastrous slumber. Every nerve in his tortured body craved rest. His eyelids seemed weighted. Twice, he dozed momentarily in spite of himself, but awakened each time at the jerk of his head as it fell forward on his chest. He bathed his face and eyes in sea-water, and the sting of the salt on his drawn skin afforded a scant relief. It was short at best, and after each repetition it grew still shorter, and the desire for sleep came back threefold.

He managed to stand erect, and gazed around toward the horizon. Nothing was to be seen but the gently heaving surface of the blue-black sea with its glassy swells that reflected the horrible glare in a manner that hurt his tired and burning eyes. Fifty miles they were from land, and as much more from the nearest steamer lane.

He sat down heavily upon the chest, and for a brief period grew light-headed and babbled incoherently. Peel and Kranz had again slumped into the bottom of the boat. They slept audibly, with their heads in the shade of the seats.

Miller looked at them absently for a while, then his gaze wandered to the bow of the boat. It fell on the painter, neatly coiled, six fathoms of stout three-inch Manila line.

"Huh!" he muttered with a sour grin. "And Peel said that I couldn't tie him. Damned if he didn't bluff me!"

Reeling and staggering giddily, he made his way to the bow, climbing over the seats and avoiding the sleepers. With the painter in one hand, he prodded Kranz with the revolver barrel.

"Sit up!" he ordered quietly. "No, sit in the bottom with your shoulders against the thwart."

It was an ingenious method Miller had devised. He led the line over the seat, under Kranz's chin, and back over the seat. Then he ran it under the seat, tight around Kranz's chest, beneath his arms, and back under the seat again.

He did this all from behind, with the revolver ever handy, to obviate any chance of Kranz's grappling with him. He shoved the revolver muzzle against Kranz's head.

"Off with your belt!" he ordered.

Miller used the belt to strap Kranz's arms behind him, drawing the leather tight just above the elbows. He then awakened Peel, and repeated the process of binding on the next thwart. Making the end of the rope fast to the after thwart, he sank back, satisfied. Both men were securely lashed to their seats by an endless line, and their arms pinioned effectively to prevent their picking the rope strands apart or assisting each other.

Almost exhausted by his efforts, Miller lay down to sleep. On he slept through the afternoon and through the night, heedless of the cries for relief, and the threats and blasphemies of his hungry, thirsty and cramped captives. For fully eighteen hours he slept. When he finally awoke he was much refreshed, but was even weaker physically than before. He released the men, and passed out food and water. Then he ordered them to the oars again.

It was high noon when he allowed them to rest, and they immediately tumbled into the bottom of the boat.

For hours Miller let them sleep, too apathetic to arouse them. He knew he was lost, for the boat had drifted far from the course while he slept. At times he sank into a state of semi-drowsiness, a morbid stupor. He aroused himself, and for a space keenly watched the sleepers.

He dropped to his knees before the chest, and lifted the cover. On top of the precious heap lay a huge crucifix of solid gold set with large rubies. Red and glowing, their bloody effulgence flashed in the sunlight. Miller crossed himself as he gazed upon it. Reverently, he finally lifted the cross.

Half an hour later he closed the chest and sat down upon it, feeling satisfied that his purpose had been well accomplished.

Peel and Kranz still slept.

Once more Miller began to grow delirious. Over the side of the boat, not eight feet away, the glistening fin of the man-eater cut smoothly through the water. It glided along with scarcely a ripple.

A small, pale, cruel, glary eye looked up at him. His unstrung nerves made him scream in terror, then in futile rage he put a bullet hole through the fin. Again he shot, and still again, and the fin disappeared.

Peel and Kranz sat up.

"Out with the oars!" screamed Miller, "and pull like hell! Row, damn you, row! Leave it behind! Leave it behind! It's after me. It's after me!"

For a mile the men tugged and sweated at the oars in deadly fear of the raving madman who sat on the chest in the stern and waved a gun, and cursed, and reviled them as he urged them to greater effort.

And then—Miller wilted!

His nerveless fingers relaxed. The revolver dropped with a clatter. Back against the tiller he collapsed, like a pricked bubble.

Like jackals, Peel and Kranz dropped their oars, and stumbled over the seats to the treasure chest. Peel's foot collided with the water-breaker, and upset it, but neither of them heeded the accident in the slightest, so intent were they upon revelling in the riches for which they had sweated and suffered all the agonies of hell in the past few days. They wanted to get their fingers upon it, to feel it, to know it was there.

Roughly, they pulled Miller from the chest. Jointly, jealously, suddenly suspicious of each other, they threw back the lid. Peel gasped! Simultaneously, each looked at the other.

The chest was empty!

For a moment neither spoke. Peel glanced down at Miller.

"Curse his heart! The preachin' knave got the best of us after all. Shoved the last bit of gold overboard, as he said he would. Damn him! He can follow it!" He started to drag the unconscious man out from under the after thwart, but at the exclamation of horror from Kranz at discovering the loss of the water, he dropped Miller.

The catastrophe was overwhelming. Turned over by Peel's hasty and unheeding foot, the precious fluid had gurgled out and mingled with the blackened and dirty sea-water in the bottom of the boat.

They found their oars were missing. Left in the tholepins in the hasty rush aft, they had slid out into the sea. The momentum of the boat had carried it five or six fathoms from the floating oars, and the distance was widening.

Peel looked at the oars, kicked off his shoes, and made ready to swim for them, but he paused.

A triangular dorsal fin, with three clean-cut bullet holes through the cartilage, glided lazily, Nemesis-like, between the boat and the oars.

They looked at each other helplessly again. Each felt the cold, clammy hand of an unseen being laid upon him. Kranz licked his lips. His mouth was too dry for words. Then he dropped on his knees in the bottom of the boat. He lifted his head, and raised his clasped hands weakly.

With the habitual sneer on his cruel lips, the beachcomber looked down at the kneeling man and scoffed. But the sneer gradually faded, as the full realization of their predicament came over him. A moment later, Peel, too, was kneeling.

"Say, Dutchy," he whispered huskily, "what was that stuff Miller was sayin' about 'No other Gods before Me'? Was that a prayer?"

"Nein! I vill teach you von!"

They had both failed to notice the black cloud approaching swiftly from the north. Came a few fitful gusts of wind, and then the tropical squall burst upon them with all its fury. The rain poured in torrents, at times almost driven in a horizontal sheet by the furious blast.

Peel leaped to the bow, as the boat spun around. By luck he managed to catch a floating oar as they drifted past it in the grasp of the wind. He was a seaman, and knew the boat would be swamped if it lay in the trough when the sea arose. Quickly, he took a turn of the painter around the oar as a makeshift oarlock over the bow, and swung the boat to drive before the gale.

With Kranz bailing frantically, and Miller lying unconscious at the other end of the boat, the beachcomber strained at the improvised steering oar. Hour after hour he steadily held the little craft to the southward as it drove before wind and sea. Cold, hungry, weary, and all but exhausted, it was only his enormous strength that enabled him to hold out.

Night came. The boat still drove. The wind had settled down to a steady gale. Peel, with anxious eyes endeavoring to penetrate the gloom ahead, began to wonder where they would fetch up. He had long since lost all idea of direction. His only hope was to keep the tiny craft afloat. When handled properly, a whaleboat is a good seaboat, and with the desperation of a cornered animal fighting for its life, Peel struggled with the sea.

At midnight, he saw a broad line of phosphorous through the spume ahead. To the right and the left it stretched out as far as his vision could reach in the darkness. He knew it to be breakers. With this mountainous sea running, perhaps it meant the end. He didn't care, he was so utterly tired and cold.

Summoning his last remaining energy, he managed to keep the bow of the boat headed towards the beach when it was caught in the maw of the surf. They rode on the summit of a curling breaker. At express-train speed it carried them in towards the shore. When it broke, it left them behind in the whitened water. The steering oar snapped, the boat broached to. The next breaker capsized it.

Peel and Kranz were thrown into the water. Miller was beneath the boat, caught in the thwart. A third breaker, following closely, dashed the two against the side of the overturned craft with stunning force.

When the tropical dawn came, it saw two bodies stiff and stark on the beach. They were Peel and Kranz. The stoved-in boat lay just beyond the reach of the surf. Miller had disappeared.

SOME months later two officials stood on the deck of the government steamer, as it lay at the dock of San Sebastian, two miles from Santa Marta Mission.

Three monks came onto the pier to supervise the distribution of the cargo of supplies, which was destined for the mission. One of the three was hollow-eyed, ascetic looking.

"Say," remarked one of the officials after scrutinizing him closely, "doesn't that monk remind you of Miller? Remember Miller, the man who shot Scanlon in Hong Kong? Bad record, he had!"

"He does resemble him a little," replied the other official, "but that is Brother Luis. He is working out some great penance. Miller would never be doing that. He wasn't that kind of man!"

Brother Luis overheard. He turned away to hide the peculiar smile which played for a moment on his thin lips.

Political bosses don't want a candidate who is too popular with the masses, because he will be independent of their attempts at control; but if they favor a candidate who isn't popular with the masses, they can't get him elected. Political bosses have a hard time of it.—*St. Louis Globe-Democrat.*

Mexico should adopt the cactus as its national flower.—*Grand Rapids Herald.*

It should be spelt $ugar.—*Greenville (S. C.) Piedmont.*

MEOWS FROM THE MOVIES

By ALICE GLENISTER

Marion Davies's recent hit, "April Folly," that made such a big record at the gigantic Capitol Theatre, New York, is proving an even bigger feature throughout the country than her "Cinema Murder" with its famous New York Rialto Theatre record. Marion has come into her own. This summer she is out at the Coast making exteriors.

One of the most spectacular five reel comedies ever attempted for the screen is now being produced by the Fox Film Company. We all love the Sunshine Widows who have brightened our leisure moments in the famous Sunshine Comedies, and are glad to know that in this particular comedy we shall have a chance to see the entire cast of Widows, which, up to the present date, has reached a total of seventy-five. The company also includes our old favorites Chester Conklin, Slim Somerville, Alta Allen, Jack Cooper, Tom Kennedy and Clyde Cook. Many directors have been assigned to take care of the making of this enormous comedy spectacle. The production is under the personal supervision of Hampton Del Ruth.

"Riders of the Dawn" is one of the best of Zane Grey's novels that has been filmed. We always did like Roy Stewart, who plays the lead; Roy isn't exactly what you might call a matinee idol so far as looks are concerned, but he certainly has a personality that screens A-1.

After viewing Fatty Arbuckle in "The Round Up," we wish to say that he has been hiding his light under a bushel during the past few years of slap-stick comedy. His performance of the genial and rotund sheriff will make history for him, as it did for Maclyn Arbuckle, who played the part in the stage production.

That lovely girl, Martha Mansfield, whose acting in John Barrymore's "Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" was so commendable, has been signed by Myron Selznick for a term of years. We'll say it is a case of good judgment on the part of Mr. Selznick.

Wanda Hawley, Realart star, has a "cullud lady" for maid who delights in Wanda's blonde hair, and who declares that it is "as fine as silk and genuwine glory yallow, Ma'am, no drug-sto' yallow to dat li'l' Missy's haid, no Mo'am."

Robert Gordon, former Blackton star, is the latest of film players to combine studio and stage work. He is rehearsing with his wife, Alma Frances, operatic star, for a state production to be placed on Broadway in the Fall. All we can say is, how do they do it?

Betty Blythe denies the report that she is to leave the screen because of her marriage to Paul Scardon, the Goldwyn director. "I couldn't if I wanted to," wrote Betty. "I have a contract to appear in 'Nomads of the North' for First National. I cannot say what I will do after that, but I certainly have no intention of giving up my work." We are glad to be assured of this.

Antonio Moreno, Vitagraph star, has granted to the Northcliffe press of England, the rights to publish in serial and book form, the story of his life from the time of his boyhood in Spain up to the

present time. The best way to get publicity is to be either a Bolshevik or a screen star.

Clever Gladys Brockwell's fortieth Fox feature is "A Sister to Salome" from the pen of Julius Furthman. We have this to say: If Salome's sister is anything like Salome, look out for our Gladys. She can act.

The title of Harold Lloyd's next comedy in which Mildred Davis plays leading lady is "High and Dry." The plot, if it may be called a plot, hangs heavily upon the question, "When is grapejuice no longer grapejuice?"

Charles Ray has a dog named "Whiskers." Last week he got something in his ear; whether it was a flea or a rumor of his master's new income has not been made clear. Whatever it was, Whiskers became very temperamental for a few moments, which is more than his master has ever been guilty of, even over the size of his new income.

Nancy Deaver, a newcomer to the screen who hails from Australia, makes her debut in the Charles Miller production, "The Law of the Yukon." Nancy has bright, gold hair and big brown eyes and a mouth that might be made for either kisses or chocolates. We predict a brilliant future for Nancy.

Carmel Myers, the heroine of dozens of popular photoplays, has come back to the screen after a successful season on Broadway in "The Magic Melody." She expects to remain in screen plays in a series of "crook" stories. It remains to be seen whether or not Universal will present to a long suffering public anything worth the price of admission as the result of Miss Myer's Broadway sojourn into the legitimate.

Bessie McCoy, the actress-widow of Richard Harding Davis, has been signed by William Fox to star in a series of pictures. Wouldn't wonder if she will appear in some of her famous husband's stories. Who, if not she, could portray his characters better?

In the Drury Lane melodrama, "The Hope," being filmed by Metro, Ruth Stonehouse wears some stunning gowns. One is an afternoon gown of lavender and blue taffeta, and there are several gorgeous evening gowns, a gay silk sport costume and a tailored pongee suit for traveling. Ruth, evidently, has not joined an old clothes club.

Robert McKim and Claire Adams have been engaged to appear in photoplays of famous novels. Claire Adams was a favorite ingenue of the English stage; and as for Robert McKim, he is one of the best liked "bad man" of the screen. He has played in four Hampton productions to date and given us some of the best work of his career.

Tom Mix, Fox's cowboy star, has added ten wild horses to his ranch at Mixville, California, and will break them in front of the camera in his next Fox picture, "The Untamed." If Tom gets through without breaking the camera, and several of them, we'll say he's good. At that, his job is easier than breaking in ten wild women.

Tommy Meighan shuttles to and fro between the Coast and New York as nonchalantly as we go from the Grand Central to Times Square; it costs more than a jitney, but Tommy should worry. We are told he is making "Ready Money," James Montgomery's farce. He has finished the "Frontier of the Stars," and by this time you may have seen him in "Conrad in Quest of His Youth."

$5,000.00
IN CASH PRIZES
for Original Short Stories of Present-Day Life for Publication in
The Black Cat

The Prizes Are:

1st Prize	- - - - - - -	$2,000
2nd "	- - - - - - -	1,200
3rd "	- - - - - - -	700
4th "	- - - - - - -	500
5th "	- - - - - - -	300
6th "	- - - - - - -	200
7th "	- - - - - - -	100

THE prize winning stories will be stories of plot, of action, of interesting complication —stories that are meaty and fast-moving, yet both real and reasonable. Spend the sweat of your brow on deeds, not on acute character analysis; on big situations, on suspense and appeal, not on tedious description and fine writing.

The check pulling stories will be the stories of BIG IDEAS, LOGICALLY and POWERFULLY developed.

Write about present-day life, and avoid the morbid, gruesome, supernatural and unpleasantly tragic. No dialect stories will be considered.

Conditions

1. Each manuscript must bear at the top of the first page the writer's real name and address, in full; also the number of words in the story, which may range from 1,500 to 6,000. Do not exceed the latter number.

2. Each manuscript must be typewritten on standard size paper (8½ x 11 inches); must be sent flat or folded, but ***not rolled,*** postage or express charges fully prepaid, and accompanied by stamped addressed envelope for return. Letters concerning stories submitted must be enclosed with manuscripts—not sent under separate cover. Manuscripts will be received and returned only at the writer's risk.

3. Every manuscript will be judged purely on story-value, on its interest in plot and action;

and the name or reputation of a writer will carry no weight whatsoever.

4. All envelopes containing manuscripts should be plainly marked "Prize Contest" and addressed "The Black Cat Magazine, Inc., 229 West 28th St., New York, N. Y." Their receipt will be acknowledged. Any competitor may send as many stories as he pleases, but in each case he must comply with all the above conditions.

5. Failure of any manuscript to fulfill all the above requirements will automatically eliminate it.

6. The competition will close June 30, 1920, and within sixty days of that date the awards will be announced in THE BLACK CAT and paid in cash. All stories submitted in the competition that are found to be acceptable for publication in THE BLACK CAT will be paid for at regular rates. Publication of these stories will begin as soon as possible, and all stories thus accepted will be published with the statement "Entered in THE BLACK CAT Prize Story Con-